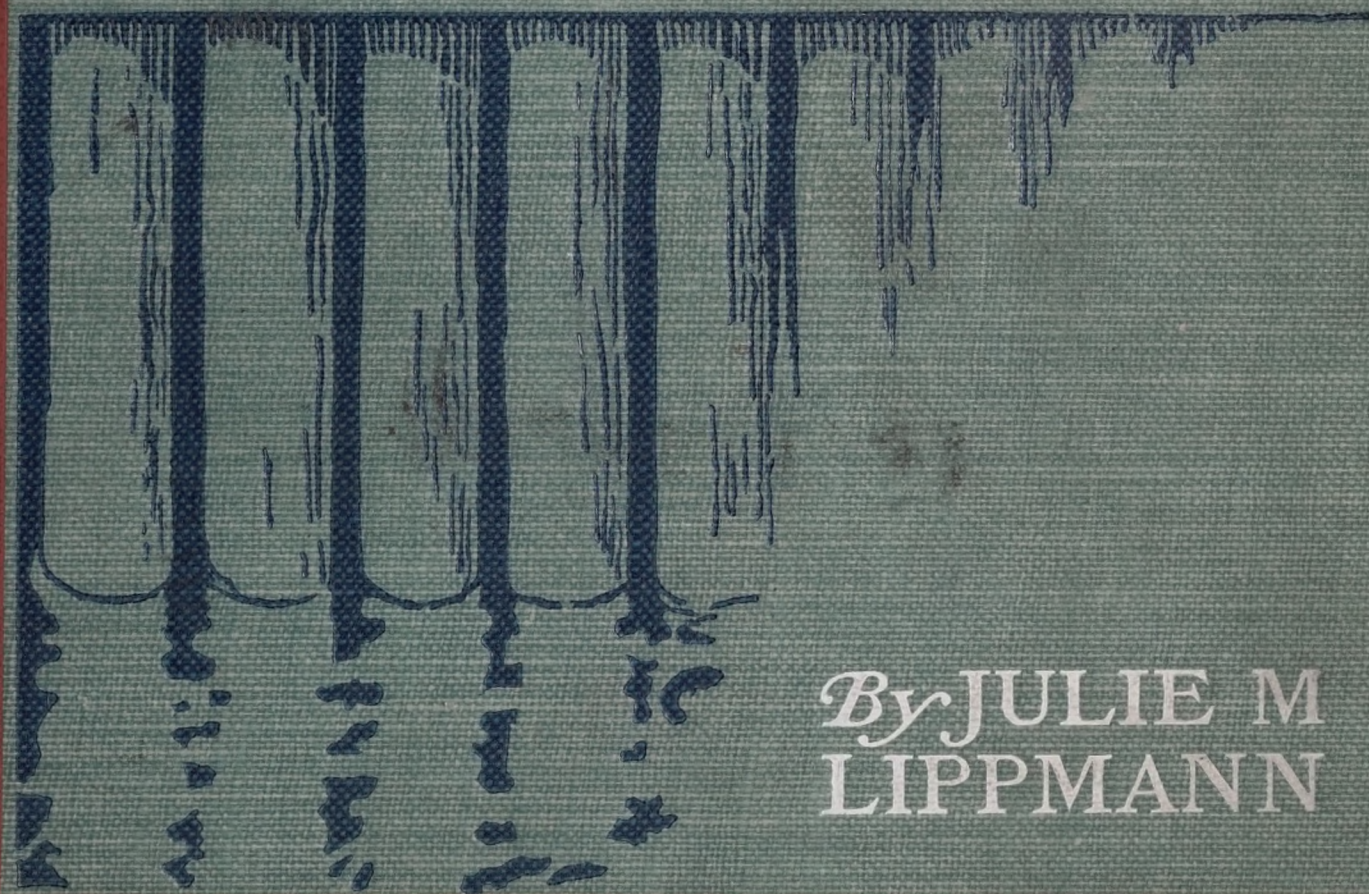




DEARIE DOT AND THE DOG



By JULIE M
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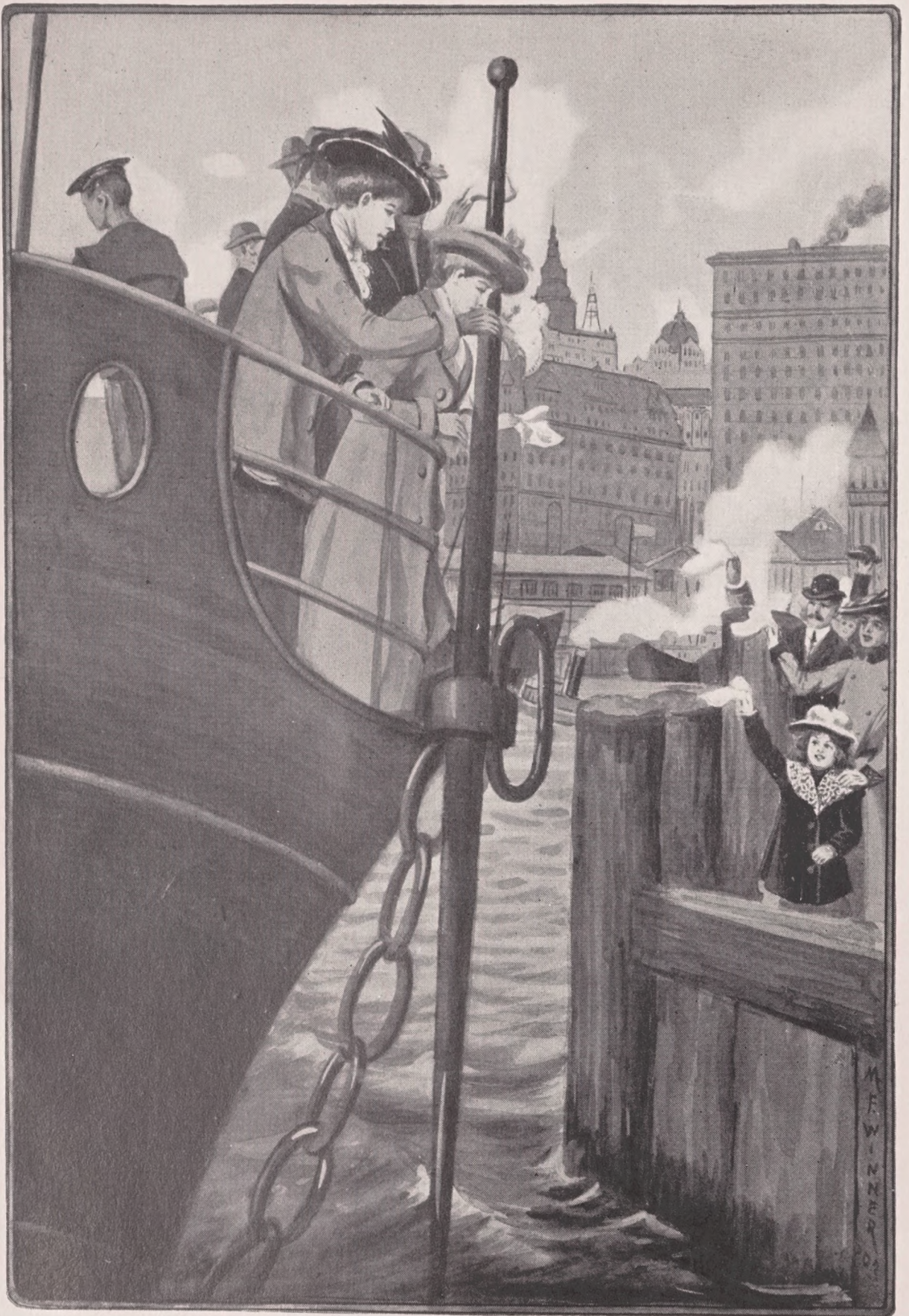
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HER MOTHER WAVED HER HAND GALLANTLY

Dearie, Dot and the Dog

By

Julie M. Lippmann

Author of "Sweet P's", etc.

Illustrated by Margaret F. Winner



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Dearie, Dot, and the Dog

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Dearie, Dot and the Dog

CHAPTER I

“CHIFFON”

DEARIE and Dot stood beside a great spile amid a crowd of people upon the pier, and Dot's mother stood beside the brass rail amid another crowd of people upon the deck of the huge ocean steamship that was just about to start upon its long voyage across the sea.

Everything was haste and noise and confusion. Whistles blew, bells clanged and men shouted.

Dot clutched Dearie's hand and snuggled closer to her side, for in all her eight short years of life she had never before been in such a hubbub as this and it frightened her very much. Her mother gazed down at her and smiled and waved her hand gallantly, but Dot could see that her face was white and that her lips trembled in spite of the smile. Hot tears welled up into Dot's eyes at the sight, but she crushed them back again, for Dearie had said that it was go-

ing to be hard enough for her mother to go away and leave her little girl behind, as she was compelled to do, without having the added grief of seeing her in sorrow and being unable to comfort her. Still, her effort might have been in vain, for a big, choking sob was rising in her throat, if just at that moment her attention had not been turned from her own trouble to that of some one else. The gangplank had been drawn away, the big warning-bell had rung "All ashore!" for the last time, and the band on deck was starting in to play the first bars of a gay military march when all at once, back upon the dock, there was a great clatter of hoofs and wheels, a great shouting, and a big man with a very red face, and a little lady with a very pale one were seen to rush frantically from the cab in which they had dashed up, toward the steamer that was just about to move away.

Dot was too little to be able to make out how these late-comers were bundled on board, but in a moment they were on the lower deck and she saw the little lady turn, look quickly toward the pier and then wring her hands together as if in great distress. The big man turned too, but he only shook his head sadly and the little woman seemed to feel that that settled

the question once and for all, whatever it might be, for she stopped wringing her hands and leaned over the brass deck-rail and gazed miserably over the water which was quickly widening between her and the land, searching for something which, apparently, she could not see.

Dot's mother nodded "good-bye" again and again; a cloud of white handkerchiefs waved from ship and shore; the band crashed out its gay tune and people cheered, laughed and cried all at once, while the great boat swung slowly out and away into the stream. Suddenly Dot saw the little lady on the lower deck give a great start, clap her hands wildly and point excitedly toward where she and Dearie were standing on the pier. Following the direction of her finger Dot turned and lo! there just beside where she stood at the top of the high spile that rose well above the edge of the pier squatted a little white dog. It was so little and so white a dog that, at first, Dot could hardly believe it was actually alive and had clambered up there alone, but in some manner it had found its way to the water's edge and was now sitting perched up at that dizzy height gazing anxiously out after the moving ship and looking so lonely and forsaken that Dot's heart quite thumped with pity at sight of

it. Without stopping to think she dropped Dearie's hand and stood on tiptoe trying to reach the snowy bunch.

"Oh, puppy, puppy!" she cried in great excitement, looking up at the wee creature adoringly, "did the ship go off and leave you? Did it? Did it?"

At the sound of her sweet young voice the tuft of white wool turned its head and looked down at Dot enquiringly, seeming dumbly to demand if she really were a friend who could sympathize and perhaps help in his time of trouble.

"Oh, dear puppy—poor puppy!" she said as if in answer to his question.

The tiny thing evidently felt satisfied that she would at least do what she could and so, to make its case quite clear it suddenly sat up stiff and straight and putting its forepaws together supplicatingly, began waving them violently up and down in the direction of the ship.

A great shout of delight went up from the watching crowd.

"See, it's begging!"

"What a cunning trick!"

"It wants to be taken to its owners on the ship!"

"The poor little mite!"

Dot's eyes were wet with tears. "Oh, I'm so sorry, puppy," she declared in a tremulous voice. "But you can't go on the ship, you know. Neither can I. It has sailed off and left us and we won't see our folks for a long, long time."

The ball of white fluff on top of the spile seemed to ponder her words very carefully, for its beseeching stopped and it sat quite still, with its head on one side, looking at her closely. "Dear, dear!" it seemed to be thinking, "I'm not at all certain I understand, but I seem to be in a very bad plight indeed. My own dear missy has gone away, on that thing that is floating off beyond there and it's impossible to reach her. I can't imagine how I came to be left behind in that wretched jolty affair they called a cab, for I am by habit very prompt and always ready and she hardly ever doesn't take me with her when she goes out. I can't believe she intended to desert me! No, indeed! Why, only this morning she put this bright, new silver collar around my neck and locked it on with a little key, and I'm sure she wouldn't have done that, if she had meant to forsake me. No, no. It was quite an accident. But, nevertheless, I'm in a very sad way. I'm afraid of this crowd of strangers. The only one I seem to understand at all is this kind young missy

with the clear voice and eyes of love for little dogs. She appears to be telling me that I can't go on the ship and that she can't either for that matter. So, it seems, we are in the same boat—which is to say we are out of the same boat. If that is really the case who will give me my meals? Who will cuddle me when I feel chilly and lonesome? Who will let me sleep on a nice silk cushion at the foot of her bed o' nights? Oh me! Oh my! I feel very forlorn and sorrowful. I wonder if I can trust this new friend? Guess I'll try. She looks kind. Anyway—here goes ——!”

Suddenly a short, sharp bark broke from the little tuft of white down on the top of the spile. It gave a long look toward the ship and then, without more ado, turned and sprang straight down into Dot's arms where it settled itself comfortably, licking her hands and wagging its tail as if to seal and sign its new compact of friendliness.

“Oh, you pet! You precious!” crooned Dot in delight.

The crowd about her cheered. It was such a pretty sight: the delicate child caressing the dainty dog: a pair of little lonely things comforting each other.

But the general noise and notice made Dot shy and

she grasped Dearie's hand tightly, whispering to her in a scared, breathless voice of anxiety :

“ Oh, Dearie, won't you please—to take me home ? ”

“ Why, yes, Dot, of course I will, if you wish to go. But I'm sure you want to have another glimpse of your mother, don't you ? See, the ship has only gone out a way, so it may have room to turn around. There ! It is turning around now. In a few minutes it will pass by here again—it may come quite near—and then, if you look sharp perhaps you can catch a glimpse of mamma and wave ‘ Good-bye ’ to her once more.”

Sure enough ! Dearie was right ! The great boat had swung slowly about and was at that very moment making straight back on its track past the pier. The crowd forgot to watch Dot and the dog in its eagerness to watch the ship and Dot herself remembered nothing but her mother and the fact that if she “ looked sharp ” she might possibly see her again. Nearer and nearer came the ship. Its decks were white with waving handkerchiefs and black with what looked like a swarm of ants. Another moment and hark ! those were the strains of the military march the band was playing. The crowd on the pier shouted and the crowd on board answered. Now the ants on deck

turned out to be real people and now the people were beginning to look like persons—persons one had seen before and could recognize. There, was not that the tall man with the field-glasses slung over his shoulder, whom Dot had noticed because he was so very cross to everybody who came in his way? And was not that the poor girl on the steerage-deck who had cried so loudly when her brother took leave of her? And there—up there—was not that Dot's mother leaning upon the rail and waving her hand gallantly and smiling that sweet, trembling smile of farewell, just as she had done before?

Suddenly Dot felt a stifling tug at her heart and heard a quivering, sobbing voice cry out:

“O, mamma, mamma! I didn't mean to—but I can't help it—I can't help crying—I want you so”—and wondered what other little girl's mother was sailing away from her and leaving her grieving behind, until she felt Dearie's comforting arm draw close about her and found herself listening to Dearie's gentle, soothing voice saying:

“Be brave, Dot darling. Don't cry! Show a smiling face. Don't let mother's last glimpse of her little daughter be a sad one,” and knew that she herself had been the girl who had cried out and that she

had done what she had promised Dearie she would on no account permit herself to do.

In a flash she had brushed the tears away and raising the white puppy high in air was waving it bravely above her head, calling "Good-bye, mamma! Good-bye, mamma!" as loud as she could shout. Her mother looked and smiled—a real, true, sure-enough smile this time and then—all at once, Dot felt herself grasped and lifted up in two, great, strong arms and set atop of the spile on which the puppy had sat. She was not in the least alarmed, for the two strong hands held her fast and one glimpse into the laughing, kindly face of the gentleman to whom they belonged was enough to convince her he was "trustable."

From her high perch it seemed as if she could look the whole ship over. There was the sick lady in the "spreading-out" chair whom she had seen carried on board. There was the big man with the red face who had almost been left behind and there—yes, there beside him was the little lady with the pale face who had wrung her hands so disconsolately when she found herself hustled on deck without her white bow-wow and who had clapped them so happily when she saw it perched safe and sound on the towering spile. She clapped them again now, as she saw Dot with the

dog in her arms and then, in a series of very expressive gestures, she made it clear to everybody about that the little creature belonged to her and that she loved it dearly, but since it had been left behind and found its way to a new friend Dot might have it to keep as her very own. The pantomime was hardly over and Dot was having to keep a sharp lookout for the concluding gestures when the great ship swept past and beyond into the distance. She caught a last, long look from her mother, sent her a bright, brave smile in return and then she was lightly lifted from off her pedestal and set upon the ground by Dearie's side.

So it was all over. The ship had started out upon her long voyage across the ocean and the ones who were left behind had nothing now to do but turn their faces toward home and make the best of life as it would be without the dear ones who had sailed away.

Dearie grasped Dot's hand and guided her safely through the wilderness of horses, drays and dockhands out into the street, while Dot, in turn, clasped doggie tightly to her breast and was only afraid that by some mischance it might escape from her and be lost forever amid the crowd.

But the puppy had no intention of being left

behind a second time that morning. It snuggled close to its new mistress and looked out from the shelter of her arm and the tangle of its own long white fringe of hair with bright, inquisitive eyes which seemed to notice everything and to see that such a big, busy world was no place for a small, unprotected dog to wander about.

It was only when they were safely settled in the homeward-bound car that Dot found her first opportunity to become really acquainted with her new treasure.

“See, oh see, Dearie!” she whispered eagerly in her young aunt’s ear. “Its eyes are brown, aren’t they? And look! It has a collar on—a bright, new, silver collar with lettering across; isn’t it beautiful?—‘C-H-I-F-F-O-N!’ What does that mean, Dearie, dear?”

Dearie smiled and examined the delicate engraving carefully.

“It is evidently the doggie’s name,” she explained. “And it is a French word that means rag or scrap. The puppy is such a shaggy, silky, white mite I suppose its mistress thought it looked like a little scrap and called it so. Just as when you were a new-born baby we thought you so very tiny a thing, that

we called you Dot although your real name is Barbara."

"Chiffon! Chiffon!" repeated Dot thoughtfully, trying to accustom herself to the doggie's foreign name.

And Chiffon in return wagged its tail vehemently and gave two short, sharp barks that sounded like "Dot! Dot!" And so it was that these two new friends were formally introduced.

CHAPTER II

GETTING ACQUAINTED

LONG after Dot and Chiffon had fallen asleep that night (Dot in her snowy white bed and Chiffon upon a soft down-cushion in a basket-bed of his own), Dearie sat awake and thought and thought until the lamp burned low and the clock chimed out the latest of hours. She did not feel precisely sad, but she certainly felt very serious, for she knew that a great responsibility had been placed upon her and she realized how difficult it would be to prove equal to it, for though in Dot's opinion she was extremely old and full of wisdom, she was in reality very youthful and only as wise as a young lady of her age has any right to be.

She was some years younger than Dot's mother, who was her only sister and in whose home she had lived ever since Mrs. Brooke's marriage to Dot's father, ten years before. Captain Brooke was a naval officer: commander of one of the ships in the government service, and two years ago he had set sail for the other side of the world where his sea duty would

keep him for twelve months longer. It had not been possible for him to take his family with him, for Dot was frail and delicate and could not have borne the climate into which he had gone, but on the other hand he himself had been ailing lately and it seemed necessary that his wife should follow him to his eastern station. So it was that she had been a passenger in the great outgoing ocean-liner that morning, and that Dearie and Dot had stood waving her a last good-bye from the end of the pier, and so it was that Dearie sat thinking such serious thoughts so late at night, while Dot lay fast asleep in her snowy white bed and Chiffon dreamed contentedly beside her in a basket-bed of his own.

To keep her sister's house for her in her absence and take proper care of her little daughter—this was what it was to be Dearie's duty to do from now on for a year to come, and it must be confessed it seemed to her to be no easy task.

“Suppose—suppose”—her troublesome thoughts kept suggesting.

But it is the worst of bad plans to give way to the discouragement that comes by “supposing” all the dreadful things that may happen, and that very seldom do, and Dearie gave herself a quick little shake

as the clock chimed out midnight, and she realized how long she had been sitting there indulging in useless worry. She turned down the wick of the lamp with a snap and hastened up-stairs to make ready for bed, a valiant look in her clear young eyes and a determined expression about her mouth. Her head had hardly touched the pillow when she was fast asleep and then, the next moment as it seemed to her, she was awakened by sounds of laughing and barking in the little room next her own, and sat up in a sudden amazement to see the sun streaming in at the window and to hear Dot's exclamations of delight over the accomplishments of her new friend who, it appeared, was "showing off" with great good nature and much pride in the appreciation his tricks received.

"Oh, Chiffon! You funny, funny lambie-dog!" Dot was saying, between laughs. "How did you learn to beg so prettily? And to think of your being able to walk on your hind legs! And to put up your paw to shake hands! Why, you're just the most knowing dog in the world!"

Dearie drew her watch out from under her pillow and looked to see what hour it was.

"Dot!—Dot!" she called cheerily. "Seven o'clock and time to get up!"

The usual answer to this summons was a languid "Very well—bime-by!" but now Dearie was astonished to hear instead the briskest of brisk voices returning, "All right, Dearie, dear, I'll hurry!"

And hurry she did, drawing on her stockings and buttoning her shoes without a murmur after Dearie had whisked her in and out of the bath tub, where she had ducked and plunged like a young porpoise at play.

"We'll have to scrub Chiffon too, one of these days," Dearie explained, while she was combing and brushing Dot's hair, and the little girl quite forgot to cry out during the operation that "it pulled," as it was her habit to do, so intent was she on the novel idea of the small dog having to be shampooed.

"He is as white as cotton wool, isn't he, Dearie?" she exclaimed, looking down proudly upon the snowy creature stretching himself lazily at her feet.

"Yes but he will not be so long, if we do not keep him properly bathed and brushed. You would be surprised to see how short a time it would take before his hair would grow smutty and matted if it were neglected. Dogs and Dots need a lot of attention if we want them to be dainty and lovable," with which Dearie lifted Dot from her chair of torture, kissed her

on both cheeks and pronounced her "done and ready for breakfast."

There were a thousand things to be attended to that day, and Dearie was so busy that she hardly had a chance to give more than an occasional hurried glance into the nursery, but every time she did so, she found the two new friends playing contentedly together and so absorbed in their games that they did not notice her at all.

"It's so much better than if Dot were lonely and fretting her heart out for her mother," she said to herself with satisfaction, as she went softly away and back to her tasks again.

In the meantime Chiffon did not find it entirely comfortable to be decked out in dolly Johanna-Marie's dresses, even though they were her "best Sunday-go-to-meeting" ones, but he tried to make the best of it until he saw his opportunity to escape, when he made a rush for the door and gave Dot a grand chase before she could catch him. Under tables and over chairs he went! Down-stairs like a little streak of white lightning and into closets and out of them again until she was fairly breathless with running, and was only too glad, when at last he let her overtake him, to strip off the objectionable garments and leave him to enjoy his

nap in peace while she pretended he had been a burglar who had broken into the nursery and made off with Johanna-Marie's wardrobe, and that she had heroically captured him and cast him into prison for his crime. She had never had such good sport and exercise as this, and she came to the luncheon-table with the healthiest of appetites and the rosiest of cheeks, while Chiffon showed his recovered relish for life by sitting up beside her chair and Dearie's and begging in his very best manner for every mouthful he saw pass between their lips.

"No one must give him any meat until we have made sure it will agree with him," declared Dearie as she prepared a delicious saucerful of bread and milk and bade Ellen, the maid, carry it to the butler's pantry, which was to be Chiffon's special dining-room after this.

"He dearly loves liver," suggested Dot. "Did you see how he jumped about and begged for it this morning, at breakfast?"

"Yes, dear, but we must not attempt to give him any until we have asked some one who knows all about dogs, just what diet is best for this breed of puppy."

"What breed of puppy?"

“Chiffon’s. I think I can safely say he’s neither a St. Bernard nor a Great Dane,” laughed Dearie looking down at the wee bunch with eyes of amusement; “but to tell you the truth I don’t know much more than that. We’ll ask a dog-fancier and he’ll be able to settle it. He’ll advise us too, what we ought to feed him and in the meantime, to avoid risks, Chiffon must be kept on the simplest of food—bread and milk, and bread and gravy and such good, harmless stuff.”

Ellen smiled a little guiltily at Dearie’s words, for she and Katy, the cook, had been unable to resist Chiffon’s captivating wiles and had given him a generous supply of liver that morning when he had turned up his fastidious little nose at his own breakfast and had wandered down into the kitchen region following the savory smell of the frying meat.

Katy had thought his begging trick the “takin’est thing ever was,” and Ellen had decided that such virtue ought certainly to be rewarded, and that “a little bite o’ somethin’ to put his teeth in,” could not possibly “harm him a mite,” and so between them both, Chiffon, like J. Sprat Esq. and his wife, had “licked the platter clean.” After such a glorious feast no wonder the simple fare Dearie was preparing

for him looked tame and uninviting. Chiffon eyed it with unconcealed scorn and when Ellen carried it into the butler's pantry and set it upon the floor, he refused to follow, turning his back upon her and deliberately walking off in another direction to show his contempt for the whole proceeding.

Dearie laughed with amusement over his high-and-mighty temper, but Dot could not see any fun in it when all the time she felt her "precious puppy" was "starving to death."

"Not a bit of it," Dearie reassured her. "He is altogether too fastidious. When he is hungry he'll be glad to take what he can get and what is good for him. We mustn't spoil him, you know. It isn't wholesome for any one to be so over-particular and finical."

Dot's eyelids quivered and she looked down at her plate with a conscious flush. She never had been able to like string-beans and there was at that moment a little pile of them hidden beneath her knife and fork which she had hoped Dearie would not discover. But now of her own accord she made a sudden dash at them and they were gone in a flash.

Dearie did not seem to notice, but when the dessert was brought in, Dot's share was unusually generous

and, as it happened to be a dish she particularly liked, she felt well repaid for her little struggle.

But Chiffon remained obstinate and the despised dish in the pantry had to be removed untasted. If Dot had dared she would have given in and gotten him something more to his taste, but Dearie had strictly forbidden it and so it was a famishing doggie, as she thought, that Dot took out for a walk that afternoon.

What fun it was to see people stop and gaze after her property with eyes of admiration and to hear them exclaim upon his attractions and accomplishments! By evening Dot knew that she owned not alone a very pretty pet but an extremely valuable one as well.

“’E’s a Maltese terrier, miss,” the dog-fancier assured Dearie. “H’and a mighty good ’un at that. I know ’im well. ’E belonged to Mrs. Livingston Lawson oos ’usband ’as been made minister to—to—well, Hi’ve forgot the name of the place, but it’s in foreign parts somewhere. She thought a lot of ’im—Hi means the dog, miss, not ’er ’usband. ’E’s got a A 1 pedigree. You’ll ’ave to look out for ’im, for there’s a plenty would be glad enough to steal ’im off of you and sell ’im again in another city for a big ’andful. Yes, miss, better feed ’im light and give ’im h’enough

h'exercise. Them little lap-dogs gets to be mighty lazy h'if you don't keep 'em stirrin' some."

"Oh, Dearie," Dot whispered excitedly, as they left the shop. "You don't really think any one would carry off my puppy, do you?"

"I hope not," returned Dearie who had been as much dismayed as Dot was by the dog-fancier's suggestion, though she would not have confessed it for the world. "I hope not. But we'll keep a sharp lookout and never lose hold of him a moment when we have him in the street. And we must warn Ellen and Katy about the basement door. He might slip out there some day if they leave it open when he is about."

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Dot. "Seems to me it's going to be very worrisome, if we've got to think of Chiffon every single minute for fear something'll happen to him."

Dearie smiled. "That's responsibility, little lady. When we have pets we must take care of them. I'm trying to take care of you and you are trying to take care of Chiffon, and so it goes."

"But who's Chiffon trying to take care of?"

"Oh—I don't know—the house, maybe. He probably feels that if he didn't bark every once



WE WILL NEVER LOSE HOLD OF HIM

in a while, all sorts of things would happen to us all."

"Well, I don't know what in the world I'd do without him now," said Dot, looking down at him adoringly as he trotted along beside her at the end of his long, newly-bought leash. "And if I knew some dreadful man had him I guess I'd—I'd cry my eyes out. Nellie Carter saw a dog once that had a firecracker tied to his tail. She told me about it. It was Fourth of July and some horrid boys had put it on, and when it went off the dog was almost frightened to death. He ran with all his might and main, and they laughed. Don't you think they were cruel, Dearie, to treat him so? Just think if Chiffon had a firecracker tied to his tail ——"

"We won't think such a thing," said Dearie. "We'll only think pleasant thoughts, if you please. Such as, for instance, how good the glass of soda-water is going to taste that we'll get in a moment or so. That's a much more agreeable subject, isn't it?"

Dot laughed and the two little anxious lines between her eyebrows promptly disappeared and did not come back again during the rest of the afternoon.

Chiffon, for his part, did not seem to be at all anxious on his own account. He trotted along with

his nose in the air and his tasselled tail gallantly frisking. He may have been grieving his heart out for Mrs. Livingston Lawson, but if he was, he managed to hide it bravely. His silver collar flashed in the sunlight, and his long, silky ears waved like two little white flags of truce in the wind, while he seemed challenging all the other dogs in town to show a more valiant spirit than his.

Nellie Carter from across the street, gazed at him with eyes of resentment as he frolicked daintily past. She and Dot had been the closest of bosom friends, and she saw at a glance that she had a dangerous rival in this little white handful of fluffy dog that was already beginning to fill such a big place in Dot's heart.

CHAPTER III

"CINDERELLA"

"OH, please, Dearie, I don't want to go," pleaded Dot.

"I wish you need not, chickie, but I'm afraid it would make unpleasant feeling if you refused. You see, Mrs. Carter made sure, as she always does, that you had nothing else to do before she asked you and if you offered an excuse now it would look as if you were envious and mean-spirited and couldn't bear to see Nellie enjoy anything you couldn't share."

The tears started to Dot's eyes. "I'm not envious, Dearie, honest and true I'm not, but it's no fun to have to go over there and see Nellie dressed every time she goes to a party. And then, when she's done and the carriage comes, I just have to turn round and walk home all alone. I'm glad for Nellie to have good times, really I am, and I don't mind it that she goes to more parties than I do, but I wish her mother wouldn't ask me over to see her dressed, so there!"

Dearie turned her face away to hide a sympathetic smile. She, too, wished Mrs. Carter would not make

such a point of asking Dot to play Cinderella, while Nellie was being adorned like one of the "proud sisters" to go to the ball. But since she did ask her and Dot had no excuse for declining the invitation, why, the only thing that remained was for her to accept with the best possible grace.

"And I do hope it's going to be good for her character," thought Dearie pitifully, "for I can see myself it's a real trial and 'no fun' as Dot says. I suppose it will teach her self-control and—and—a great many other valuable lessons, but somehow, I can't feel that Mrs. Carter is called upon to help discipline our Dot. I really believe that the next time she suggests it I'll refuse for the child myself and put an end to the whole annoying business."

But in the meantime Dot was compelled to keep to her promise to "run over and stay a little while with Nellie" that afternoon. It was some comfort to her that she could hold Chiffon in her arms during the ordeal, and she cuddled him close as she sat perched up in a chair in the corner of Nellie's room, to be "out of the way," as Anna the nurse said.

"See my new stockings," cried Nellie, waving them excitedly about her head as she returned from her bath. "Don't you wish they were yours?"

They're solid silk and cost lots and lots, and I have brand-new slippers too, with straps across the ankles and cunning steel buckles in front."

"They're perfectly dear," said Dot sincerely, though with something of an effort.

It gave Nellie a double share of pleasure in her possessions to have Dot sitting there and watching her as she displayed them, and she pranced about nimbly in a gale of delight, until Mrs. Carter and Anna had to hold her down and laughingly threaten to tie her to her chair if she did not sit still and allow them to fix her hair properly.

"You will like to see Nellie's new party-dress, Dot," announced Mrs. Carter in her clear, hard voice, which was so different from Dearie's clear, soft one. "Of course a child like you couldn't be expected to know that all the lace on it is real, but your mamma and your auntie would, and they could tell you that it is a very handsome frock indeed."

"O, I think it's perfectly lovely," said Cinderella from her corner, gazing up at the fleecy, filmy thing with eyes full of admiration. "It's the prettiest dress I ever saw."

"I think it's lots nicer than my last one," announced the "proud sister," loftily. "And I thought that was

just too sweet for anything when it was new. The dress you had on at Gretchen Lewis's party hadn't any lace on it at all, Dot, had it?"

"N—no. Only embroidery," returned Dot.

"Your mamma likes simple things, she says," Mrs. Carter put in, as she fastened Nellie's hair-ribbon and stuck a pin in it to keep it firm. "Too bad! You'd rather she didn't, wouldn't you?"

Somehow Dot felt, she could not have told why, that Mrs. Carter's words carried a sort of sting and sneer in them, and yet they were innocent enough in themselves as any one could hear. Her chin lifted a little and her eyes were very bright as she said proudly :

"I think what my mamma thinks is perfectly right, and if she doesn't want to have me wear fancy things I'd just as lief not."

Mrs. Carter and Anna exchanged glances.

"That's right! Stick up for your mother," cried Nellie in a smothered voice from a billow of lace, as the wonderful party-dress was slipped over her head. "She always does that, mamma. No matter what Mrs. Brooke says, Dot always thinks it's just right."

"And very proper it is that she should," returned Mrs. Carter, and again Dot felt offended by her words,

although she could not have explained why. But this time she pursed her lips together and did not say anything in return. She simply bent over Chiffon who lay asleep in her lap, and tried to hide the angry flush in her cheeks in his silky coat.

She drew a deep sigh of relief when the carriage was announced, and was so glad to be free to run away to the shelter of home that she quite forgot to feel left out in the cold when Nellie skipped blithely downstairs crying, "Good-bye, everybody! I'm going to have a lovely time! Don't you wish you were going?"

Dearie was out when Dot got back to the house, but pretty Aunt Bessie, Uncle Will Brooke's young wife was in the sitting-room, and the little girl ran gayly out to greet her.

"Oh, I'm so glad, I'm so glad you've come," she cried hospitably.

"And where have you been all the time I've been waiting here for you?" demanded Aunt Bessie. "And what is this you have in your arms?"

"I've been over across the way—at Nellie Carter's," replied Dot in a whirl. "And this is my new dog. Isn't he a dear, darling thing? His name is Chiffon, and he belonged to a lady who went away on the same

ship mamma was on. But she was late—I mean the lady was—and her husband is a minister somewhere, and they only just managed to get aboard the boat and Chiffon was left behind, and it sailed away and he sat on a big standing-up log of wood at the end of that big wooden thing in the water where we were and waved his hands—paws, I mean—and begged. And then I spoke to him and he liked me and the lady and gentleman turned around when the ship did and she made motions that I could have him to keep—I mean, Chiffon to keep—and he likes liver, and Dearie says he must eat bread and gravy, and the dog-man thinks he's a very fine puppy, and that if we don't look out some one may carry him off—I mean, may carry the puppy off, not the dog-man."

Mrs. Brooke laughed merrily. "Oh, I understand perfectly," she assured Dot with a mischievous pinch of her chin. "As you tell it one couldn't possibly get confused. And so you and Chiffon have just been making an afternoon call?"

Dot's face clouded over in an instant. "We went to Nellie Carter's," she replied with an effort.

"And who is Nellie Carter, I wonder?"

"She lives across the street and she's my best friend."

“Indeed! And what brought you home so early? When I was a little girl I never came back until the last gun fired—I mean till the last moment.”

“Oh—I—she—you see, I only went over there to—to—look at her dress for the party,” admitted Dot with an effort.

Young Mrs. Brooke’s eyes twinkled with amusement. “Only went over to look at her dress for the party?” she repeated. “Dear me, that must have been rather tiresome, I should think. Why didn’t you go to the party, too?”

“I don’t know the little girl who is having it—that is, not very well. She didn’t ask me.”

“And do you like to go over and watch Nellie dress for parties you’re not invited to?” enquired sprightly Aunt Bessie injudiciously.

“N—no. Not very much,” confessed Dot hesitatingly. “But her mother always asks me, and mamma and Dearie think I have to go.”

Young Mrs. Brooke’s bright eyes flashed with sudden spirit.

“Well, it’s a shame, that’s my opinion!” she broke out impulsively, looking very much like a flushed, angry child herself. “I declare it is. To make you go over there and see her get ready for a good time all by

herself! And then have her ride away and leave you to come home alone—I don't wonder you don't like it. I should just hate it myself and I am amazed at your mother and Dearie for making you."

Never in all her life before had Dot felt the slightest doubt of her mother's and Dearie's perfect justice toward her, but now, all in a moment she felt herself abused and unfairly treated, and in a sudden outburst of confidence she opened her heart to Aunt Bessie and told her all her grievances. How she "hadn't any ring at all" while Nellie had three. How Mrs. Carter liked to make Nellie's dresses "fancy" and her own mother "wouldn't let her have but just a hem to her clothes and only plain embroidery on her party-dress," and how she wished she didn't have to go over and see Nellie dress for things she could not go to herself. She did not feel at all as if she were talking to "a grown-up young lady," for Aunt Bessie looked so girlish and little and was so interested and sympathetic that she seemed as companionable as Nellie herself and was not, as a matter of fact, a bit more reasonable. Aunt Bessie was a spoiled child: the only daughter of moneyed parents and no wish of hers, foolish or otherwise, had ever been ungratified. At heart she was generous, affectionate and loyal, but she had never

been taught self-denial nor self-control, and she showed the effects of it.

“Why, you poor little soul,” she exclaimed, in a tone Dot had never heard her mother or Dearie use, “you don’t mean to say you want a ring and haven’t got one! I never heard of such a thing! It’s perfectly tragic! But never mind! It’s all right now. I’ll give you one myself!”

With a quick, impulsive little gesture she stripped off her dainty gloves and held her two white, dimpled hands outspread for Dot to see. The fourth and little fingers of each were loaded down with rings set with precious stones which sparkled and danced in the sunlight.

Dot gazed at them in wonder and admiration.

“Now, honey, take your choice of any of these pinkey-rings,” directed the fairy god-mother, cheerily. “You can have whichever you want and I reckon any one of them will be worth more than all three put together belonging to your friend across the street. Here’s a half-hoop of little diamonds and rubies. Do you like it? And here’s another with a couple of small pearls and a turquoise. How’s that? Slip them on your finger, pussy, and get the effect.”

Dot hardly dared breathe she was so astonished,

but she did as she was bidden and then stood speechless, her eyes glued to the gleaming gems that—wonder of wonders! might be her very own.

Aunt Bessie laughed with sheer delight. Somehow she felt as she had used to feel, not so many years ago, when she was a little girl herself and had dressed her handsomest doll in all sorts of elaborate finery pretending it was alive and could appreciate its splendor.

This present dolly was very much alive indeed and at the sight of her appreciation a new thought popped into Aunt Bessie's busy brain. She clapped her hands together delightedly.

"I know what we'll do!" she announced to the astonished Dot. "It'll be the greatest fun in the world! We'll have a party of our very own, at my house! The splndidest party you ever saw! And Nellie Carter sha'n't come to it—not one single step! And you shall have a frock with lace on it—every bit as good as hers and better—and silk stockings and slippers and—I'll give them to you myself and Dearie can't possibly object because, you see, I'm your very own, brand-new auntie and almost as much relation to you as she is herself. And when the time comes you shall ask Nellie Carter to come over and see you dress—turn about is fair play, and then you

shall roll off in your own carriage—mine, you know—and she shall be left behind for a change. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways—but I guess you'd better not tell Dearie anything about that part of it, for she and your mother have quaint ideas about bringing you up and of course it's right that you should be ladylike and kind and generous and all that sort of thing, and they are perfectly lovely women themselves, there's no doubt about that, but for my part I never did believe it was necessary to let other people ride over me and boast and swagger, and I not do a thing in return, and so we'll just keep this a secret between our two selves and I warrant Mrs. Carter won't invite you over there again for the express purpose of making you envious and miserable."

Dot's head swam!

A splendid party of her very own! At Aunt Bessie's new house! A frock with real lace on it! and tucks! better than Nellie's! Silk stockings! and slippers! A ring with precious stones in it—to keep forever and ever as her very own! A carriage to roll away in! Cinderella could hardly believe her ears! It was all just exactly like a wonderful story out of a book where everything happened precisely as one

wanted it to and the naughty ones got paid off in the end as they deserved.

The fairy god-mother saw that Cinderella was fairly bewildered by all her unexpected good-fortune and her great blue eyes glowed with satisfaction at the success of her plan, while she did not stop for a moment to think that she might really be injuring the little girl whom she so much wished to please.

She bade Dot good-bye with a kiss and a smile and a wave of the hand, and rolled off in her brougham in a very happy frame of mind, quite approving of herself and feeling she had done a very excellent thing indeed.

But Dearie, when she came home and saw the beautiful ring gleaming on Dot's finger and heard her descriptions of the dress Aunt Bessie had promised and the party she was going to give, shook her head in perplexity. She could not offend Aunt Bessie by refusing her favors, but she thought such valuable jewels out of place on a little girl's hand and she utterly disapproved of the rest when they were to be arranged for the express purpose of "paying off" Nellie.

Dot never suspected it, but Dearie saw through the whole thing in a minute and chose to keep her

own counsel only because she really loved the two naughty conspirators and wanted to give them a chance to redeem their good characters by thinking better, of their own accord, of their unworthy plan.

But would they do it? That was the question.

CHAPTER IV

PREPARATIONS

AUNT BESSIE began to prepare for her "spite-party," as Dearie called it in her mind, with all the good-nature in the world and soon got so absorbed in her arrangements for making a number of children happy that she quite forgot that the point of it all was to make one child miserable. She flew about from shop to shop in a delightful flurry of hospitable excitement and every one in her household as well as in her family was pressed into active service. Her mother, stout, big-hearted Mrs. Huntley, grew quite short of breath and red in the face in her attempts to keep up with the pace, but she persisted bravely and was so clever about suggesting improvements and new ideas for entertainment and offering to pay for them out of her own pocketbook, no matter how much they cost, that Aunt Bessie was quite charmed and found her an invaluable assistant.

"While we're at it, darlin', it's my advice to do it as handsomely as it can be done," the portly lady announced on more than one occasion, when even her

lavish little daughter hesitated at some quite unnecessary expense. "We haven't had a child in the family since you were one and I declare it does my heart good. After all there's nothin' that's quite so satisfactory as children —— They do enjoy things so much that it pays for all one's trouble just to see how pleased they are. Besides they're such innocent, guileless little things! They never bear ill-will or are envious or mean-spirited as we grown folks—that call ourselves their betters—often are." And Aunt Bessie, forgetting all about Nellie Carter, nodded her head sagely and assented, "Oh, no indeed!" with the warmest of enthusiasm.

Perhaps Dearie might have had a different tale to tell if her opinion had been asked, for she was watching Dot closely these days and what she saw would not have led her to agree with Mrs. Huntley.

The day after "proud sister" Nellie had been driven away to her "ball" in triumph, leaving Cinderella Dot, as she thought, to return home disconsolate, she came over to Dot's house to tell her about the fun she had had and the bon-bons and favors she had received.

"You never did in all your born days, see such a lovely party," she announced exultantly, almost

before she got inside the door. "We had games and everything you can think of and a lot of men playing a real orchestra—and—— Why! what's that you've got on your finger, Dot?"

Dot had been smoothing Chiffon's white coat but at Nellie's words she stopped and gazed down at her left hand with a little air of sudden surprise and pretended unconcern.

"What? O, this? Why—it's only a ring," she returned, as if it were of no importance at all and she wanted to hear more about the party.

Nellie bent over and examined it eagerly.

"It isn't yours?" she said, half in doubt, half in question.

"Yes it is, too. You can ask Dearie if it isn't."

"Why, where in the world did you get it, Dot Brooke?"

"My Aunt Bessie gave it to me yesterday. It was one of her very own and she took it off her little finger and it just fits me and it's mine to keep for ever'n ever."

Nellie looked not only impressed—she looked thoroughly overpowered by such splendor. All the grandeur of her party vanished before the brilliance of this wonderful ring with its beautiful, gleaming

stones, and she could only gaze and gaze at it and try to swallow down the dry lump that had risen in her throat and that seemed to be trying to choke her.

Meanwhile Dot was growing bolder every minute, with a new sort of cold, hard courage such as she had never known before. She was by nature tender-hearted and sympathetic, and could not bear to see even the littlest insect suffer, but now it seemed to her that she would like to watch Nellie being miserable and would find it "fun" to say the things that would make her so.

"My Aunt Bessie has promised me ——"

She broke off in the middle of her sentence and clapped her hand across her mouth.

"There! Just hear me! I was almost going to speak about it and it's a secret that I promised her I wouldn't whisper to a single, living soul. But it's the loveliest thing you ever heard of and—I'd tell you, Nellie, before I'd tell anybody else."

"I wish you would tell me," urged Nellie, humbly. "I'd never breathe—honest and true! Cross my heart!"

"Oh, no, indeed, I couldn't," declared Dot stoutly. "I couldn't. But you'll know after a little while, when it happens, and I just guess you'll be surprised!"

Nellie's curiosity was fired to the boiling point. She teased and pestered all in vain for quite a quarter of an hour, and then all of a sudden she dropped the subject, and to Dot's surprise and annoyance, did not bring it up again but went home very soon after with her chin in the air.

"Well, pussy, did you have a nice time with Nellie this morning?" asked Dearie at luncheon-time when Dot came in a little late, looking fretful and discontented, with Chiffon following, unnoticed, after.

"N—no."

"What seemed to be the trouble?"

"Oh, nothing much—only she—she bragged about the party and I—I don't think it's very nice to brag about the things you've been to, do you, Dearie?"

Dearie smiled. "Decidedly not!" she said with a heartiness that made Dot's heavy spirits rise. But they dropped immediately after with a great plunge when Dearie added cheerfully: "Nor about the things you're going to, either. Nor about what you have or are expecting to have, not about anything at all, in fact. I don't think bragging is ever nice and I'm sure nobody who knows how vulgar and offensive it is will ever do it."

Dot twirled her ring about her finger in silence and

looked down glumly at her plate while Chiffon squatted beside her chair and begged piteously to a perfectly unresponsive little mistress.

Aunt Bessie came early in the afternoon to carry Dot off to be measured for her frock and Dearie let them drive away without once attempting to interfere with the gay plans they were making for "clouds of lace" and "miles of tucking," and all the rest of the extravagant impossibilities that she and Dot's mother so heartily disapproved of.

So the days passed by and the time for the spite-party drew near. Dot waited until the proper moment and then with a guilty conscience and a thumping heart she went over to Nellie's house and asked to see Mrs. Carter.

There was a visitor in the sitting-room, and the presence of this strange lady made Dot feel more awkward than ever about her errand.

"My—my auntie—she—wants to know," she began in a halting whisper and with a great effort,—“my auntie—she wants to know if Nellie can come over to my house this afternoon.”

"Why, yes, of course she can," assented Mrs. Carter cordially turning from her guest for a moment and taking Dot's hand in hers in a friendly fashion.

which was quite unusual with her. "Tell Dearie I thank her very much for her invitation and Nellie will be pleased to go."

Dot looked at the floor and swallowed hard. Her words stuck in her throat and she choked over them, even if they were, as she told herself, "not a really, truly fib, for when she said her 'auntie' she was thinking of Aunt Bessie, and if Mrs. Carter thought she meant Dearie, why, she couldn't help it, could she?" She took care, however, not to promise to carry the reply to a message which had never been sent.

"And what are you and Nellie going to do, I wonder? Going to give a doll's afternoon-tea? Or just have games and a good time generally out of doors?" continued Nellie's mother affably.

"No—'m. We're—we're—I mean—I—I'm going to a party and—and—p'raps Nellie'd like to come over and see me dress." It was out at last.

Mrs. Carter's dark eyebrows drew together in a quick little frown of displeasure as she dropped Dot's hand with a sort of fling. She saw at once that this was a clear case of paying back old scores and though she knew very well that she had been to blame in the first place, she deeply resented what plainly was an attempt on Dearie's part at retaliation. But she had

been fairly caught in her own trap and she could not get out of it without openly admitting that she had deliberately asked Dot to do something she was not willing to demand of Nellie.

"Oh, indeed! So you're going to a party, are you?" she said with a cold smile.

"Yes, at my Aunt Bessie's," replied Dot hastily, standing uneasily on one foot in her shyest attitude and showing quite plainly how anxious she was to get away.

"Your—Aunt Bessie," repeated Mrs. Carter, hesitating over the name as if it were entirely unfamiliar to her. "I—oh, yes, I remember now. You mean your Uncle Will's wife, I suppose," and then she turned her back squarely upon Dot and addressed herself to the lady beside her, as if Dot were not present to hear what she was saying. "Will Brooke married Miss Huntley about a year ago—Bessie Huntley, daughter of Henry D. Huntley, the railroad man, you know. You probably remember the wedding—the papers were full of it at the time. Very rich and—frightfully ordinary. I've often seen the mother. Fat—with a red face—a foolish old thing, I fancy, but good-natured and kind-hearted enough, if she is shoddy."

Dot slipped out of the room with her cheeks ablaze. She did not understand what "ordinary" and "shoddy" meant, but she felt they must be very uncomplimentary terms from the tone in which Mrs. Carter uttered them and her heart was brimming over with indignation and shame. She could hardly crush back the tears as she went slowly home, and when Chiffon met her at the door with a sharp bark of welcome and a loving flicker of his tasselled tail, she gave way entirely, buried her face in his flossy coat and treated him to quite a shower-bath of hot, angry tears. She found Dearie in her own little bedroom busily engaged in getting her things ready for the afternoon. The wonderful new frock had arrived while she was across the street and now the sight of it as Dearie lifted it from its tissue-paper wrappings dried her tears in a twinkling.

"O, Dearie, Dearie, isn't it a darling? Isn't it a beauty?" she cried excitedly, dancing around and around the fascinating box in a fever of delight.

Dearie smiled. "I'm glad you like it," she replied simply.

Surely never before had a little girl had a gift of such delicate, dainty finery as this. There were splendid openwork silk stockings and tiny slippers with

wee straps that crossed over the instep and fastened with a turquoise buckle at the ankle. There was a turquoise locket on a gold chain to hang about her neck and half a dozen little turquoise buttons for the back of her dress. Nothing was lacking. Everything had been remembered. Even to a handkerchief as fine as a spider's web and about as big. The only fault to be found with the collection was that it was altogether too splendid. Dearie sighed as she thought of Dot's mother and her dislike of anything that looked boastful and extravagant. What would she have said to all this?

Dot could hardly swallow her luncheon, she was in such a state of happy excitement, and as for Chiffon, to his unspeakable disgust he had had to submit to another bath when his last was still fresh in his memory and nothing in the way of mere bread-and-milk could divert him when he felt as uncomfortably sleek and damp as this.

So Dearie was the only one left who really enjoyed her food, and for the sake of her restless little companions she swallowed it hastily to return to the more absorbing occupation of getting ready for the party.

It was only on such occasions as this that Dot could be prevailed upon to take an afternoon nap, but now

she and Chiffon curled up luxuriously on Dearie's couch and actually drifted off into a delicious doze to the accompaniment of Dearie's low-pitched monotonous voice reading aloud to them in a drowsy undertone.

They had been asleep an hour or more when there was the sound of a timid, reluctant knock upon the door. Dearie tiptoed to the threshold expecting to find Ellen with some message or other from Katy about the butcher or the grocer and was much surprised to see, instead, Nellie Carter, looking anything but happy and saying in a low, sullen voice:

"My mother said I was to come over 'cause you wanted me to see Dot dress for the party."

Even Nellie could not but notice the involuntary start of surprise Dearie gave at her words, but she had no time to wonder at it before she felt her kind hand on her shoulder and heard her kind voice whispering in her ear:

"Dot is taking a nap, dear, but she will be sure to wake up in a minute or so and then we can all have a nice little visit together—you and she and Chiffon and I."

Somehow or other Nellie could never nurse her ill-nature long when Dearie was around. She had such

a bright, cheery way of talking to you and such a kind and trustful way of looking straight into your eyes—it seemed to sweeten the bitterest mood. Just now Nellie's mood was very bitter indeed, but little by little it gave way under the influence of Dearie's friendliness and she found herself listening to stories of Chiffon's tricks and manners and really enjoying them when, a few moments before she had thought in her envious little heart that she should never be able to enjoy anything again.

Dot awakened to find the two chatting and laughing gaily together and it was only when she herself jumped up with a bound of happy excitement crying out that Nellie must come and see her lovely new things for the party, that the old scowl returned and the sullen frown which had challenged Dearie at the door. They did not fade by any means at sight of the treasures lying outspread upon the counterpane, but for some reason or other Dearie did not interfere to banish them this time and Dot was too full of her own pleasure and importance to notice anything beside. She was in fact so taken up with them that the clock had struck half-past three before she realized that Dearie had not done the slightest thing on her own account in the way of getting ready for the

party. "O, Dearie, dear," she cried wringing her hands in real distress. "It begins at four and you haven't even begun to dress—and Aunt Bessie said very particularly you were to come and so did Mrs. Huntley—and we'll be late and—and ——"

Dearie broke in upon her bewailings with a smile of reassurance. "Don't worry, dear, you'll not be late," she said simply. "When the carriage comes you will be ready and can go at once. But I shall ask you to make my excuses to Aunt Bessie—I am very sorry and disappointed but I am compelled to stay at home and send you alone. I cannot go to the party."

CHAPTER V

THE SPITE-PARTY

DOT could hardly believe her ears. Dearie not going to the party after she had faithfully promised Aunt Bessie that she would! Dearie who never broke her word! Somehow, all in a moment Dot felt her spirits sink down, down, down as low as they could possibly get and even the captivating little blue buckles on the straps of her slippers did not seem to be able to hold them back. Her chin began to quiver.

Dearie gave Chiffon's flossy white coat one last good brush for full measure, pressed down and running over, tied a coquettish pink ribbon about his neck and let him go free to prance wildly about the room in a great state of excitement over his festive appearance. As far as could be seen the little dog was the only one that seemed to be genuinely enjoying himself. Dearie was smiling to be sure, but her smile was not of the customary "really truly" sort that had a twinkle in the eye of it. Nellie was having a hard struggle to keep the tears back and her

face was flushed and sulky with the effort and Dot was pale and trembling from disappointment and regret—for half the fun was in having Dearie go too—and now Dearie was not going.

“O Dearie, you must!” she burst out at last in a voice which sounded strangely like a sob. “Why you must, you must! You promised Aunt Bessie, you know, and you can’t break your word. It would be just awful!”

It looked as if in another moment there might be active work for the spider-web handkerchief to do, but at Dearie’s first words all hint of tears vanished from Dot’s eyes and they were bright and large with something else instead.

“I am much sorrier than you can possibly be, Dot, that I am compelled to break my promise,” Dearie explained, “but I am sure Aunt Bessie will excuse me when she learns the reason of my staying at home. You see, I did not know when I told her I would come that you were going to make an engagement for me here—but since you have done so, why, there is nothing left for me but to keep it, of course.”

Dot’s mouth opened wide in amazement. She did not understand. What in the world did Dearie mean? She gazed at her in dumb astonishment and

then, all at once, as her eyes followed Dearie's and fell upon Nellie she comprehended. It was exactly as if Dearie had spoken aloud and said :

“You invited your friend over here in my name ; told her mother I wanted to know if she could come, and so I have got to take the consequences and stay at home and entertain her. But if you think I am going to tell her you fibbed and put you to shame before her you are very much mistaken. I love you and I do not want to have any one know you would be guilty of an untruth, but when a wrong is done somebody has got to pay the penalty and this time I will pay it in your place . . . only please be good enough not to complain.”

It was all over in a flash and Nellie, sitting there choking back her envious tears, did not see that anything unusual was happening, but she jumped to her feet with a sudden bounce of quick delight as Dot cried out vehemently :

“It's my party ! Aunt Bessie said it was ! She said I could invite any one I wanted to. And so you run home this minute, Nellie Carter, and ask your mother to dress you as quick as ever she can 'cause when the carriage comes you're to go in it to the party with Dearie and me.”

The last words were hardly out of her mouth when Nellie was dashing homeward on her joyful errand.

Dearie caught Dot up in her arms for a moment, fuss, feathers and all, and hugged her close. "That's my good girl again," she said happily as she flew to her room and tried to make up for lost time by a "lightning-change" of costume.

How they managed it was never explained, but both Dearie and Nellie were ready and waiting when the carriage arrived, and the only one who was left behind was Mrs. Carter, who waved good-bye to them from the front door and did not look in the least aggrieved at having to make her way home alone.

Kind, gracious little Aunt Bessie put Dearie and Dot at their ease at once by welcoming Nellie most cordially, and Nellie, for her part, fell in love with her blithe young hostess on the spot.

"She's just too sweet for anything," she whispered in Dot's ear as they sat together in a cushioned corner, resting from their exertions in one game and preparing for another. "When I'm a grown-up young lady I want to be just exactly like her."

"Dearie is every bit as good," exclaimed Dot staunchly.

"O, of course! Dearie is perfectly splendid. I

only meant your Aunt Bessie is so kind of cute and cunning and she has such lovely things. This is the most splendiferous party I ever went to. A real awning out in the street and such stacks and stacks of flowers!"

Before Dot could arrange her face to look sufficiently unconcerned and as if such things were merely ordinary every-day affairs and not worth mentioning, another game was started and the two were whisked off in opposite directions to join in the sport and keep the ball rolling. Such fun as they had and such wonderful surprises! Everything they played held a gift for the child who excelled in it, so it was twice as exciting as when it was done the ordinary way. The thimble they "hunted" was of "solid gold" and fell to the share of the little girl who found it the most number of times. The handkerchief they "dropped" was a dainty, embroidered affair with lace at the edge, and was given to the child who picked it up the oftenest. There was a ring in a cake and all sorts of treasures in a Jack Horner pie, and if any one went away without a prize it was certainly not Aunt Bessie's fault.

It was quite impossible for Dot to refrain from sending Nellie a telegraphic glance every once in a

while which said as plainly as words, "Aren't you having a perfectly lovely time?" to which Nellie responded with the answering message, "I should think so! It's just too much fun for anything."

They forgot they were rivals. Nellie did not have time to remember, in the pleasure she was having, that Dot's dress was "fancier" than her own, and Dot herself never thought of it for an instant until she was reminded in a way that made her cheeks burn.

Uncle Will came in while the party was in full swing and Dot, who adored him, almost twisted her neck out of joint in her efforts to catch his eye, from her faraway place in a corner, from which she could not escape until "Puss" should be off her guard. But when she had succeeded in attracting his attention, lo and behold! he glanced at her quite unconcernedly, and then looked away again without the slightest sign of pleasure or recognition. Dot felt her face flush and her eyes fill. She knew, of course, that it was a mistake, and that somehow or other he had not realized that the little girl who was smiling and nodding to him so affectionately was her very own self, and yet it hurt "way deep down" to have him give her the same sort of look he was giving the rest of the party, none of whom was his own niece at all. As soon as the



"THIS CANNOT BE MY DOT"

game was finished she made her way to where he was standing, talking and laughing gaily with Dearie and Aunt Bess, and slipped her hand into his with an eager, anxious little gesture. His large fingers closed about her small ones in a moment, and he whisked her around in front of him, his eyes all alight with fun and fondness, and his voice full of jolly welcome, as he cried out: "Well, here she is at last! I was wondering where she was hiding."

But the instant his glance fell full upon her his whole expression changed. His eyebrows went up and he gave a long, low whistle of disapprobation.

"Phew-w! What in the world is this?" he exclaimed, holding her out at arm's length and scanning her critically from head to toe. "Surely this can't be my Dot, rigged up in such a nonsensical fashion! Why, I declare I didn't know her! For pity's sake, Dearie, what have you been doing to the child? She doesn't look like herself at all. What's the trouble?"

It was a difficult moment for everybody. Dot felt wounded and disappointed and ashamed, all at one and the same time; Dearie looked embarrassed and Aunt Bessie turned quite scarlet in a self-conscious, guilty sort of way.

"What do you mean, Will?" she demanded quickly

and with a pout of annoyance. "Dot looks very nice, I'm sure. I chose her dress myself. Dearie had nothing at all to do with it, and every one can see that it's most expensive. It has a lot of lace and handwork on it and ——"

Uncle Will looked down affectionately at his little wife and gave her a cheery smile, which was meant to take the sting out of his words:

"That's where the fault lies, little lady," he exclaimed. "As you say, 'every one can see that it is most expensive.' According to my idea it would be better if they couldn't. I don't like showy, flashy things. Forgive me if I say I think Dot is overdressed and that this party is overdone. One can have too much even of a good thing, you know. You are the kindest little woman in the world and Dot is the dearest little girl, and I know that neither of you want to make a boast of what you've got—but when you struggle to wear the richest-looking clothes and give the most expensive parties in town, I must admit it seems as if you did. At any rate I like my Dot better in the pretty, simple things she usually wears, and I hope when she puts on this fussy, pretentious affair again she'll let me know and give me the chance to get out of the way."

As he spoke he gave the dimple in Dot's chin a playful pinch, but somehow she could not smile and was just beginning to feel exceedingly solemn when supper was announced and Uncle Will made them all laugh in spite of themselves by saying he was like the

“ Young man so benighted
Who never knew when he was slighted.
He went to a party and ate just as hearty
As if he'd been really invited.”

The children were all vastly amused by his drolleries as he led the march into the supper-room with Chiffon for a partner. But they soon forgot everything else in the wonderful feast they found awaiting them there. It was the crowning glory of the evening and Aunt Bessie's face grew merry again as she saw how much the children enjoyed it. As for Dearie, she felt at peace with herself and all the world. It did her heart good to watch Auntie Bess hovering about Nellie and Dot to make sure they were well supplied with goodies while they sat side by side chattering in the most intimate and friendly fashion possible, quite forgetful of the fact that this was the famous “spite-party” which had been made for the express purpose of paying back old injuries and squaring old slights.

CHAPTER VI

“MRS. HITCHCOCK AND MRS. BROWN”

BUT neither dogs nor dresses, rings nor parties can fill the place of an absent mamma, and there were many, many hours when Dot felt such a loneliness and mother-want that she had all she could do to keep from giving up in despair and making everybody as miserable as she was herself.

The long, loving letters which presently began to arrive were some comfort to be sure and it grew to be the great excitement of the week to watch for “steamer-days” and the postman’s whistle. Dearie hunted up a large atlas and together she and Dot followed the traveler on her journey in a way that proved to be altogether delightful. While she was crossing the water they filled up the time by reading books of the sea, telling of all sorts of wonderful creatures which live in the depths of the ocean and about the marvelous flowers which grow in its bed as well as the pearls for which divers risk their lives.

Then, when land was reached, they traced her way

upon the map learning the names of the countries through which she passed and their principal cities and some of the most interesting things concerning their history. It was like a long, continuous story with plenty of illustrations, for Dearie took care always to get books which were richly besprinkled with pictures which Dot could examine to her heart's content as she sat in Dearie's lap or looked over her elbow as she read aloud. Then, too, there were the letters they themselves sent abroad and which cost a deal of time and trouble to write. Dot was not very fond of anything over which she had to labor particularly, but while Dearie was quite willing to help her with her letters she refused point-blank to write them for her.

"No, little lazybones," she said, laughing at the rueful expression of Dot's face. "You must do it yourself. I can't be your amanuensis. If you want to get letters you must do something to earn them."

"But my thumb aches," wailed Dot dolefully.

"We'll put some arnica on it," returned Dearie, amused at her excuse and taking out the pen and paper without delay.

"I've told her all about Chiffon and the party," said Dot listlessly. "I told her all about them in my

other letters. I haven't got anything left to write about."

But somehow or other with hints and suggestions from Dearie the letter was written at last and then Dot cast herself languidly on the couch and hid her face in the cushions while Chiffon leaped up beside her and tried to show his sympathy by licking her ear.

But when Nellie came in soon after, Dot's spirits seemed to revive and Dearie shook her head over children's whims as she saw how the two were sitting with their heads close together and whispering eagerly in a way which warned her secrets were afoot.

"How many've you got?" demanded Nellie in Dot's ear, and with a side glance at Dearie to see if she could overhear.

"My little work-bag full," replied Dot promptly. "Katy preserved a lot and a lot the other day and she let me have all the stones and I smashed 'em with the big hatchet out in the back yard and I've got the most pits you ever saw."

"Well, I guess you've got more'n I have. But we must take 'em when they're fresh. I don't believe the man would want to buy 'em if they are dry and shriveled up."

"O dear!" said Dot, with a sudden qualm of doubt. "Suppose it isn't true! Are you certain sure druggists will buy peach-pits, Nellie? What do they do with them?"

"I don't know. Make medicine-stuff, I guess. Anyhow, Mary Post told me her brother told her that he and another boy sold a lot once and got real money for them."

"O goody! I hope they'll buy ours. I want awfully much to give Dearie a surprise for her birthday and I haven't got any money 'xcept what's in my bank and she won't let me touch that."

"Will she let you go to-morrow morning?"

"You ask her, bimeby, and if she will I'll come over to your house right after breakfast. I want to tell you about my thumb. It hurts dreadfully. I pounded it with the hatchet as hard as ever I could the other day and it keeps throbbing worse and worse every minute."

"P'raps it's a runaround," suggested Nellie cheerfully. "I had one once and it pained me so I just screamed like anything. If Dearie'll let you go don't you forget to come over to my house to-morrow morning the first thing. It's an awfully long way to walk down to the druggist that buys them, and we'll

have to start early. I've got to go now, 'cause my mother said I could only stay five minutes."

"Dear me," said Dearie, as she saw their visitor getting ready to depart. "This is an unusually short call. Must you really hurry away so soon?"

"Yes'm. My mother told me to. I only came over to see if Dot could go on an errand with me tomorrow morning."

"Why, yes, of course she can. I suppose it's an errand for your mother and quite in the neighborhood. Of course you understand I shouldn't like Dot to go very far from home unless there were some grown-up person with her."

Nellie wove her fingers together as if she were getting ready to play "Here's the church and here's the steeple," but she said nothing. She was thinking:

"I'm not telling a story. She said she s'posed it wasn't far and I can't help it if she s'poses wrong. We're big enough to take care of ourselves now anyway—Dot's most nine and I'm eleven—and it's ridiculous to make such a fuss about Dot's going very far from home unless there's some one grown-up with her. I guess I know enough to take care of myself, even if she doesn't, so there!"

The next morning the two children started out

bright and early. Dot had much trouble to slip away without Chiffon's knowledge, but Nellie had expressly said she didn't want him tagging along and so, though it hurt his mistress to desert him, she was compelled to do so and to comfort herself with the thought that he would probably be much better off where he was. It was a bright, warm day and the two set out at a brisk trot.

"Isn't it fun to be going down town all alone by ourselves?" asked Nellie, giving a little skip of satisfaction. "I feel just as grown-up as I can feel. When I step down the curbstones my dress almost touches at the back, you watch and see if it doesn't. And at the party that time I looked in the big mirror and my head came pretty nearly up to your Aunt Bessie's ear. Let's play we're real grown-up young ladies going down town to buy things for our families."

"All right," acquiesced Dot, but in a half-hearted, dejected sort of way which was not at all inspiring to Nellie. The fact was, her thumb was paining so sharply that only the wild excitement of this secret expedition kept her courage up and the tears of agony from starting to her eyes. However, she kept even pace with Nellie and they carried on a lively conver-

sation as "Mrs. Hitchcock" and "Mrs. Brown" for the two good miles which lay between home and the place where the druggist lived whom Mary Post's brother had told about.

"My little girl, Violet, needs a new dress terribly much," said Mrs. Nellie Hitchcock busily, as they trotted comfortably along. "Her old one is all worn out and besides she never liked it. I guess I'll buy her a spandy new one to-day and take it home for a surprise. Doesn't your Lilly need another dress, Mrs. Brown? I thought hers looked fearful shabby in the back, the last time she came over to play with Violet."

"Yes, indeed, I know it. But I don't believe I can afford to get her a new one. I made a whole lot of peach preserves the other day and Mr. Brown he said they cost so much he guessed we'd have to wait until he could earn some more money before he could buy Lilly any new clothes."

"O, dear me, you don't say so! I'm surprised to hear it! But that doesn't make any difference. You come into this place with me and you won't have to pay any money at all, 'cause we run a bill here and they let us have everything we want for nothing."

Mrs. Brown hesitated and drew back as Mrs. Hitch-

cock actually led the way through the entrance of a very imposing shop, but that lady was by this time so taken up with her idea, that she not alone went on determinedly herself but dragged her friend behind her in spite of her timid whispered protests, saying resolutely :

“ Oh, pooh ! Don’t be a ’fraid-cat ! Come ahead ! ”

As it happened the place was almost deserted. It was late in the season and early in the day and the few shoppers that remained in town had not as yet arrived in any force. The clerks stood behind their counters idly talking together or busying themselves rearranging their stock.

Mrs. Hitchcock sauntered leisurely along the aisles in exact imitation of her mother, looking about her, full of a serious interest in all the articles she saw displayed and pausing every now and then to finger this material or to examine that “ bargain ” with the air of an experienced shopper. Mrs. Brown was too much over-awed to do anything but meekly follow her leader, and the two made their way in this order down the whole length of the spacious room.

“ Goodness me, Mrs. Brown,” said Mrs. Hitchcock at length, turning quickly around and addressing her friend so suddenly that she made her jump. “ Just

look at that beautiful stuff! It's the nicest color I ever saw and I have a good mind to buy it for Violet this minute."

The two salesmen behind the counter before which she stood overheard her words and winked to each other solemnly above her head. They had nothing particular to do and were quite willing, for the fun of the thing, to enter into the game which they saw was afoot.

"It's an excellent material, ma'am," said one, holding it out enticingly and shaking it into attractive folds. "And you'll find it wears like iron."

Mrs. Hitchcock was a trifle startled but she recovered herself at once and proceeded to scramble up upon the revolving stool before her, leaving Mrs. Brown to follow her example.

"Yes, you'll find it will wear like iron," repeated the salesman, giving the goods another cheerful shake.

"Have you got forty yards of it?" inquired Mrs. Hitchcock, after she had made sure of her balance on the high stool.

"Forty yards ——? Oh, I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, I must have forty yards for a dress for my little girl, Violet," Mrs. Hitchcock explained. "But

if you haven't got 'em, I might look at something else."

That was the beginning. Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs. Brown remained for an hour at the counter, examining materials and making remarks, while the salesman joined in the game and carried it on with the greatest zest. He found it harder work to keep a straight face at some of the serious observations of his customers than he did to lift down the heavy rolls of materials they desired to examine, but he gallantly did his part, and when the ladies at last scrambled off their perches assuring him that they would have to go now because their children would get into mischief if they didn't, he bowed in the gravest of manners and said he would be sure to send them their goods by telegraph as soon as the messenger could tie them up and that he hoped they would find them satisfactory.

The next errand was to the drug-man, but as it happened, this gentleman was not in a playful mood that morning, and he looked so forbidding when he discovered that the newcomers wanted to sell peach-pits instead of buy soda-water, that he quite glowered at them over the counter, making Mrs. Brown quail and even Mrs. Hitchcock turn a shade paler.

"No, I don't want to buy any peach-pits," he growled, in a deep, husky voice. "And you'd better run along home to your mothers, both of you. This is my busy day."

But Mrs. Hitchcock was not to be so easily disposed of.

"Mary Post's brother said he and another boy sold you some," she insisted obstinately.

The gruff man scowled at her darkly. "Well, I can't help it if he did. I haven't any use for peach-pits."

Mrs. Brown's chin quivered, and she took up the bag she had so hopefully laid upon the counter with a sigh of heavy disappointment and prepared to go.

"We came down here—it's miles and miles off from where we live," continued Mrs. Hitchcock, persistently, "because Mary Post she told us you would buy 'em."

The druggist glanced down at trembling Mrs. Brown.

"Is that full of peach-pits?" he demanded, sweeping a gesture toward her bag.

"Yes'm—I mean sir. I smashed 'em myself and they're not dried up a bit, see?"

She held out her treasures timidly and in an instant

the sternness had all vanished from the cross man's eyes leaving them as kind and trustable as anybody's else. He thrust out his hand and grasped, not her bag, but her wrist.

"What's this?" he demanded gently, raising her hand and closely examining her thumb.

"I hammered it and it hurts," she replied, with a great effort not to cry, because she was tired and in pain and he was looking so sorry for her.

"Why, bless your heart, you poor youngster, I believe you. Of course it does," he exclaimed heartily. "It's kind of hard luck to have hammered a hurt on yourself like that and then get nothing for your pains. I believe I will buy your peach-pits after all. What'll you take for 'em? A bright new dime, eh? But if I give as much as that you'll have to let me put a plaster on that thumb of yours. I've got the best sort of a plaster you ever saw. A real beauty. Just you wait a minute and I'll go and get it and we'll clap it round and then by and by your thumb will be better."

As he spoke he disappeared at the back of the shop and Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs. Brown were left to look triumphantly at each other in speechless delight at the unexpected good fortune which had befallen them

and to begin considering all the wonders such a mine of riches would enable them to perform.

Dot almost forgot her pain in the pleasure of planning the splendid birthday surprise she intended to make for Dearie and before she fairly knew it the drug-man had come back holding the plaster spread out upon his palm.

It hurt her badly when he touched the sick finger, but she pressed her lips together tight and shut her eyes fast to keep back the groan and the tears which threatened to escape.

"There now, it's all over and you're as brave as a soldier," declared the drug-man after a moment. "I'd like to warrant you never had on a nicer plaster than this in all your life. When you get home I want you to ask your doctor if it isn't a fine one. And here's a piece of rock-candy for you, for being so plucky. But if I were you I wouldn't try to sell things again unless my mother gave me leave. You mightn't fare so well the next time. Good-bye to you! Here—don't go away and forget your money! That's it! A dime for each and the rock-candy besides for the young lady with the hurt thumb. Good-bye!"

As Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs. Brown passed out of the door murmuring their grateful "Oh, thank you!

Good-bye! Good-bye!" the drug-man turned to his clerk and said:

"I tell you what it is, I'm downright sorry for that poor youngster. She's going to have a tough time with that thumb of hers. It'll have to be a heap worse before it's any better. Unless I'm very much mistaken she's fixing for a felon."

CHAPTER VII

ON THE WAY HOME

"DID you ever?" demanded Nellie as soon as they were out upon the street once more.

"Wasn't he kind?" said Dot.

"I'm going to buy a doll with my money. One of those lovely jointed ones with real hair—that you can dress and the clothes will take off."

Curiously enough the distance seemed double as great going back as it had been coming. They walked and walked and still the way stretched endlessly on. It was midday and the sun blazed down hot and merciless upon the blistering pavement below. Dot felt faint from the glare and heat and pain and weariness, and Nellie was cross from hunger.

"Oh, dear me, slow-poke! Why don't you hurry?" she exclaimed at last, turning on Dot in fretful impatience and venting her peevishness on the readiest object at hand.

"I'm hurrying all I can," returned Dot reproachfully. "I guess I want to get home as much as you do."

"You don't, either. You just lag and lag and lag, and I have to keep back 'cause you're such a great baby you don't know the way alone."

"I'm no more a baby than you are. You can go ahead by yourself if you want to."

"Pooh!"

They walked on for some time in moody silence, Dot trying with all her might to keep up with Nellie who had broken into a sort of run and was getting further ahead every minute. But it was no use. Her feet would not go fast enough and at last she had to give it up. Bright specks were dancing before her eyes and a buzzing sound was in her ears. She stood still and tried to shut out the sunlight by pressing her well hand across her forehead. When she took it away and opened her eyes again Nellie was nowhere to be seen.

A great wave of homesickness swept over Dot. Her mother had never seemed so far away nor Dearie half so dear, and now all alone she was not sure she knew the way home.

In the meantime a spirit of naughty mischief had taken possession of Nellie.

"Huh!" said she to herself. "Dot thinks she's mighty smârt, but she is nothing but a great baby

and she doesn't know her way home alone a bit. She's a regular little 'fraid-cat too. Never would have got any money for her peach-pits if I hadn't kept speaking to the man. Wonder what she'd do if I was to skip into a doorway and hide when she wasn't looking and make believe I'd run away. It would plague her like anything for she'd be scared to death and wouldn't know where I'd gone."

She had not really intended to try the trick, but before she was fairly able to realize what she was doing she had skipped into a doorway and was pressing back against the wall in order to screen herself from view when Dot should pass by. But she waited and waited in vain. Dot did not pass by.

"Slow-poke!" Nellie snapped out crossly at length as she leaned forward stealthily and peeped down the street to see how near at hand the laggard might chance to be. But no sign of her was anywhere to be discovered and after a moment of eager gazing this way and that Nellie left her hiding-place and ran out into the street in a sudden hot fever of fear.

Suppose Dot had turned the wrong corner! Suppose a kidnapper had carried her off! All in an instant Nellie seemed to realize how fond she was of her little playmate and how terribly she would feel if

any harm had come to her. A hundred sweet, friendly memories came thronging to her mind and every one was a fresh stab. The time Dot had "stood up for her" when big, rough David Nash tried to spoil her pinwheel store and said she was a "Proudy." The times she had "given in" and taken the parts in their play which Nellie was unwilling to take; the times she had given the bigger half of some "treat" to Nellie instead of keeping it herself and last of all, the time she had taken her to Aunt Bessie's party when she might so easily have "paid her back" for the many occasions when Nellie had flaunted her own better luck in Dot's face and driven off (there was no denying it) exultant because she was leaving her little friend behind. It all came over her now with sickening distinctness and she wanted to run and run to escape from it. But where should she run to? Home? Her mother would punish her severely when she knew what she had done. To Dot's house? She could not bear the thought of Dearie's distress when she learned that Dot was lost.

For the first time in Nellie's life she knew what it meant to be shut out from the love and good opinion of one's friends; to be a sufferer because of one's own

ill-doing. She gritted her teeth tight and gulped back the great lump of misery that was choking her. Then suddenly she tossed back her head and set off in a quick run back along the way she had come. She meant to search for Dot and find her if she could. No matter about her being hungry! No matter about her being hot and tired! She would not rest until she had undone the mischief she had made and could face the world again.

The point where the children had parted was, in reality not very far from home. A half-dozen blocks or so and a couple of turns would have brought them safely back, but Dot did not know this and when she saw no trace of Nellie her timid heart sank into her boots and she would have wrung her hands in despair if her sick thumb had not prevented it.

“O dear! O dear!” she wailed to herself. “Whatever shall I do? I had no business to let Nellie think that I knew the way home. It wasn’t the truth a bit. But she called me a baby and it made me cross. I wish we hadn’t quarreled together. I don’t want to be un-friends with Nellie. Only she tantalizes me so it seems as if I couldn’t stand it. And now—and now ——”

Suddenly she felt her sun-dazzled eyes grow blurred

and the white, dancing specks that troubled her so were blotted out for a moment. But when she brushed away the mist, one of the white specks still remained, dancing about her feet and dashing up against her dress. She wondered why it had not disappeared with the rest and tried, a little dizzily to push it away, but in a twinkling it had leaped almost into her arms, uttering a sharp, rapturous bark that sounded exactly like "Dot! Dot!" and she knew that now she had a friend close at hand who would not desert her.

"Oh, you dear Chiffon! You darling dog!" she cried brokenly, stooping down and hugging him joyously, never stopping to think in her pleasure at seeing him, how it came about that he had escaped from the house and was running such dangers in the street, alone. Chiffon leaped and frolicked about her feet for a moment in a frenzy of sheer delight and then set off in a quick scamper up the street, inviting her with every turn of his mischievous little head to beat him in a race. Tired as she was she did not dare refuse his challenge for she dreaded every minute to see the "dreadful man" the dog-fancier had spoken of dart out from some hidden ambush and spirit her precious puppy away. So after him she dashed, as

fast as her feet would carry her and in a twinkling he had led her around the corner, across the park and into a street which she knew quite well. She gave a quick, breathless little gasp of relief. Could it be that she was safe? She was familiar with the neighborhood now and could easily find her way home from here. A few more blocks and she would be in Dearie's arms. The comforting thought gave her strength to make a last frantic dash after Chiffon. He pelted on, she followed and lo! there they were at the very house and Chiffon was squatting, short-breathed but triumphant on the door-step.

Dearie met them in the hall as soon as Dot's feeble ring of the bell had been answered and not a word of rebuke did she utter though it was quite plain to be seen that she had been deeply worried and anxious.

"How flushed you are," she said kindly, laying a loving hand against Dot's burning cheek. "The heat and glare in the street are frightful to-day. I am glad to get you safely home and out of the sun."

"Thanks be!" murmured Ellen as she made her way down to the kitchen and Katy a minute later, "That little varmint of a dog is safe and sound. An' me havin' the connipshuns over'm for fear he was lost entirely an' then what 'ud the child say? For

she told me to keep um safe an' tight an' out of the airy an' not let um loose, an' bad luck to it! before I knew I'd opened the airy-gate to say a word to Sammy Bonto an' if the rare little puppy wasn't through it like a flash! It's a small imp he is, to be sure, an' him alookin' as innocint and helpless as a white baa-lamb in a toy-store winder."

Katy laughed and set the pitcherful of lemonade she had just made upon the ice to cool.

"You're in luck this time, Ellen," she replied. "But when you've a streak of greased lightnin' to deal wit' you better keep your mind on it."

Something of the kind may have been passing in Dearie's thoughts as she stripped off Dot's steaming garments and sponged her hot, feverish little body with comforting tepid water. But she knew that this was not the time to reason with the runaway, when plainly she was quite upset and exhausted by her experience whatever it had been.

"Why, sweetheart, what is this?" she asked as she came to the grimy hand with the clumsy plaster decorating the thumb, which Dot had succeeded in hiding out of sight until now.

"I—I—my thumb has got a sore place on it and the drug-man he put a plaster 'round it."

“What drug-man?”

“The one Nellie and I went to. We—we”—and then out came the whole story—all except the part where Nellie had run away from her. For some reason or other Dot did not tell of that and later she was glad.

Dearie hardly knew what to do. She was annoyed and amused and grieved and touched all at one and the same time. There was not the slightest doubt that Dot had been very naughty to go so far away when she knew it was against orders and she had been acting a falsehood when she stood by and said nothing when Nellie let Dearie “suppose” her errand was in the neighborhood. But she had wanted to give Dearie a pleasure, a surprise, she had not intended to worry her and she had really been very patient and brave about her finger which she had hurt in a generous cause. Dearie kissed her and contented herself with saying:

“Well, I think you won’t go away like this again, will you, dear? For it is dangerous for you as well as unkind to me. And now that you know it is just as wrong to act an untruth as it is to tell one I’m sure you’ll be more careful another time and so we’ll not talk about it any more, but we’ll begin all over again,

fresh and new, and try to do better—a great deal better from now on.”

That was all, but Dot never forgot it.

She hardly ate any luncheon, though everything was especially dainty and appetizing, and was glad to be excused from the table before the meal was over to lie upon the couch in the cool, dim library where she could prop her hand up and soothe the pain a bit by stroking the hot, swelled muscles of her arm. The quiet and the dusky coolness calmed her and by and by she fell into a heavy sleep—a sleep which caused Dearie to knit her brow anxiously when she saw it and at last to slip up-stairs and set the telephone bell to ringing.

A big elephant was pursuing Dot in her dreams and she could not seem to run fast enough to escape him. Or was it the other way about and was she trying to catch up with him? It was very confusing indeed for, really, she had thought he was chasing her until she saw him far ahead and found she was chasing him and Chiffon was barking at her and Nellie was laughing. At last the elephant stopped and waved his trunk at her—or no! she thought it was his trunk but it turned out to be forty yards of dress material which he said would wear like iron. But she did not

want to buy the goods and he grew angry and shook them into folds and they caught on her thumb and wound round it tight and the elephant said it was the nicest plaster she had ever seen and he wound it round tighter and tighter till it hurt her so she cried out loud and then—in a breath the elephant and the forty yards and the plaster and Chiffon and Nellie had all disappeared and she was lying on the library couch sobbing and crying and Dr. Clark was holding her hand and gently uncovering her sick thumb.

“Bad dreams?” he asked smiling down at her kindly. “Well, well, we must see if we can’t stop all that right off. We can’t have our Dot crying out in her sleep, that’s very sure.”

Dot felt Dearie’s soft hand on her forehead and gritted her teeth together because even the doctor’s gentle touch was torturing her thumb and she wanted to be brave and bear it “like a soldier.”

“Sure enough! That is a fine plaster,” he said as he bent over to examine it carefully. “And it is a fine thumb too: a mighty fine thumb. But on the whole I think I prefer its mate—the one that keeps its own size and color and hasn’t grown hard and hot and painful. Well, now, our business is to get this one back to its own shape and color again, isn’t it?”

And we can do it if we make up our minds to be patient and courageous and as cheerful as we can."

Dot smiled through her pain and her tears and Dearie smiled too, though she did not feel at all merry.

The doctor went away after a little while and when he was gone, Dearie and Dot had quite a festival all by themselves with ice cream and cold lemonade and the thinnest of wafers for refreshment. Dearie pretended she was "story-reader to the queen" and that Dot was the queen whom the story-reader was to entertain and the game proved so satisfactory that it was kept up until six o'clock and was only interrupted then by the loud, sharp ringing of the door-bell and, a moment later, the hasty entrance of Mrs. Carter who burst into the library crying out in a high, angry voice full of fretful worryment:

"Dot Brooke, tell me this minute, where is Nellie? She went off with you this morning and she hasn't been seen since, and—and I just got home myself five minutes ago—I have been out all day—and it's getting late and I don't know what has become of her, and you must tell me directly—just as fast as you can—for if she is lost—O Dot, please tell me where Nellie is!"

CHAPTER VIII

BEING BRAVE

DOT did not reply at once. She was too surprised and confused. Nellie not home yet? What could it mean? She knew her way about perfectly and so she could not have been lost! What could have happened to her? It had never occurred to Dot that Nellie might not be safe and sound at home. But since she was not safe and sound at home, where was she?

"O Dot, please tell me where Nellie is," repeated Mrs. Carter, gazing helplessly and imploringly into the little girl's troubled eyes.

Dearie had laid down her book as soon as the door opened, and now she closed it softly and slipped a tender, encouraging hand into Dot's, which was trembling violently.

"I—I don't know."

"Why, you must know, that's all there is about it," insisted Mrs. Carter hysterically. "You and Nellie went out together this morning, and it stands to reason that you must know better than any one else where she is."

"I don't," whispered Dot in real terror. "I honestly, truly don't."

"Where was Nellie when you saw her last?" enquired Dearie gently.

"In the street."

"What street?"

"I don't know. It was down a lot of blocks, and then across the park, and then around a corner."

"That doesn't help us in the least," said Mrs. Carter impatiently. "Why didn't you keep together? Where did Nellie go?"

"I don't know," repeated Dot. "We were talking and then she—hurried a little—and the sun got in my eyes—and—I couldn't go very fast—and the next thing I knew I looked up and Nellie wasn't there."

Mrs. Carter cast a glance of indignant appeal at Dearie as much as to say: "Won't you please make that child tell the truth? I'm sure she knows more than she is admitting."

But Dearie did not meet the look, and only stroked Dot's hand more tenderly than ever.

"Mr. Carter is half distracted," broke out Nellie's mother complainingly. "He's telephoning right and left—to all the police stations and everywhere. He will never forgive me if anything has happened to the

child, though mercy knows I am not to blame. It's Anna's place to look after her, and if she's as careless as this she'll have to go, that's all. But you ought to have known better, Dot, than to have left Nellie in the street. It was exceedingly wrong of you, and if you were my child I would punish you severely."

Dot turned her face to the couch cushion and cried softly into the fluffy down while Chiffon, who felt that something was amiss somewhere, lifted himself up out of her arm and barked savagely at Mrs. Carter. It was impossible to see his attitude of reckless bravery without smiling, and Mrs. Carter smiled.

"I—I'm sorry I have been so hasty," she said shamefacedly. "I don't at all mean what I said, only—you see—I'm so terribly worried. And if Dot could only tell me where Nellie is ——"

"I'm very sure she would gladly do so if she could," put in Dearie warmly. "When Dot tells me she has no idea what has become of Nellie I believe her absolutely."

"Nellie knew her way home," whispered Dot gratefully, from the depths of her cushion.

"And so did you, as it seems," Mrs. Carter retorted.

For a second there was no answer to this. Then

came a low-voiced, hesitating—"N—no," from the pillow. "N—no. I didn't know my way home. I let Nellie think that I did, but I didn't. I told her she could go on if she wanted to, 'cause I knew how to get back alone, but it wasn't the truth and—and—I guess I'd have been lost if it hadn't been for Chiffon."

Mrs. Carter shrugged her shoulders in sheer discouragement. "I don't in the least see what that has to do with the matter," she broke out impatiently.

But Dearie's troubled eyes grew bright with relief because, for her part, she saw perfectly. It was quite clear to her that if Dot had told Nellie she knew her way home it was because Nellie had taunted her with not knowing it, and that if Dot said Nellie could go on if she wanted to, it was because Nellie had threatened to do precisely that thing. But though she reasoned the whole thing out in her mind and felt convinced it was true, she was glad Dot was showing so loyal a spirit and was not being a tell-tale.

After a little Mrs. Carter took her leave, still protesting and complaining and scolding and appealing in a breath, and when she had gone, Dearie took up her book again. But neither she nor Dot could keep their minds upon the story now and at last it had to be laid aside because what had happened to

the people it told about was not half so distracting as what might be happening to Nellie at that very moment. Dinner was a cheerless meal, and they were glad when it was over, but after it was done time hung heavy on their hands.

"If I could only do something," sighed Dot desperately.

Dearie shook her head. "That is the hard part of it," she said. "We can't do anything—we must simply 'stand and wait.' Sometimes patience is the most trying task of all. It is very difficult to have patience to hold one's temper and one's tongue and one's courage when we are troubled and anxious and afraid. But if we succeed in doing it we have accomplished great things."

"I know what you mean," declared Dot, after a moment of musing. "When you thought I had been to blame this morning you weren't cross and scolding a bit. You were having patience, weren't you?"

"I was trying to," said Dearie.

"And the time of the party when you thought you'd have to stay home and amuse Nellie—because I ——"

"Yes," nodded Dearie.

"I want to tell you something," whispered Dot shyly. "I want to tell you that—that—I'm so glad you aren't like Mrs. Carter."

Dearie found it hard to restrain a smile, but all she said was, "Well, honey, I'm glad you prefer me, but Mrs. Carter is a very good woman at heart, though she is a trifle hasty at times. She—— Hark! what's that?"

It was the door-bell sounding faint and muffled through the evening stillness. Another minute and there was a buzz of smothered voices in the hall. Dearie and Dot jumped to their feet and ran anxiously to the door, their faces white as chalk and their hearts beating like trip-hammers.

"What is it, oh what is it?" Dot cried breathlessly, the thought of harm to Nellie clutching at her heart.

"Dot—oh, Dot!" came pantingly from a little shadow behind Ellen and in another moment Nellie, pale and haggard, dusty and exhausted had rushed forward, flung herself bodily upon Dot and was crying quite wildly in tearful, broken gasps:

"You're safe! You're safe! You aren't lost after all! I've been hunting for you everywhere! All day long—ever since. And I couldn't find you—and I thought you didn't know the way home and I said

you were a baby—and you aren't and I'm sorry—and I didn't want to come home till I had you safe but—but—I couldn't find you and it grew so late and—I knew Dearie would be worried, but I thought that perhaps if I came back and told her you were lost she—they could maybe—find ——”

While Dearie rushed across to the Carters' to tell the good news Dot and Nellie clung together laughing and crying with joy and relief and Ellen flew down-stairs to get something for the famished little wanderer to eat. She had not had a mouthful all day and was weak and faint from fasting, but through it all she had clutched a small bundle which she now gave to Dot with a look of true repentance and apology.

“I bought it for you,” she declared happily. “Out of my own ten cents.”

“It” was a small porcelain doll, with jointed limbs and a splendid head of golden hair.

“O Nellie!” cried Dot, and then she stopped short and just let the rest go unspoken, but Nellie understood.

If she had not been so thoroughly worn out Nellie could not have helped feeling a wee bit important sitting before Dearie's afternoon tea-table with a dainty

dinner spread out before her, while her mother and father and Dearie and Dot sat about in a circle gazing at her thankfully and urging her to eat. But she was fairly exhausted with all her adventures and before she had nearly cleared her plate her head was nodding and her eyes were dim.

Mr. Carter gathered her up in his arms as if she had been a baby and marched her off home and to bed without more ado.

Dot was so excited and agitated she could hardly sleep.

To think of Nellie's having gone through so much for her sake! To think of her having given her the precious doll which she had so joyously looked forward to buying for herself! It was almost unbelievable! Dot's own dime had lain forgotten on the mantelpiece all the afternoon but before she went to bed she lifted it carefully down and looked at it anxiously. It would take a great deal of thought and calculation to arrange a plan for making it stretch over Dearie's birthday-surprise and a gift for Nellie too, but it must be done. She fell into a troubled doze wondering how it could be contrived.

They were hard days which followed, days so full of pain and misery for Dot that she quite forgot

everything but her own utter wretchedness. Nellie and Dearie were her brave stand-bys and helped as no one else could have done to get her through the dreary time. Nellie stroked her arm by the hour, never tiring, never complaining, never discouraged, and Dearie read to them both when Dot could bear it, and invented new surprises for them every day.

Then suddenly one morning Dr. Clark decided that if she could be very brave and courageous he could relieve her of her pain and though she felt like running away and hiding to escape him she sat up straight and held out her hand and lo! after one minute of the worst agony she had ever known her thumb felt better.

“Good girl! Brave Dot,” exclaimed the doctor heartily, and took a bright silver dollar out of his vest-pocket and gave it to her with an approving smile.

And after that, oh dear, how she slept! At first it was so beautiful to be rid of that throbbing, cutting pain in her thumb, that she was glad to just lie on the couch in Dearie’s room without any other amusement than listening to the lazy flies as they buzzed and bumped against the wire window-screens. But by and by she grew better and then it was hard work to be patient and good-humored.

The weather was sultry and hot. Aunt Bessie and Uncle Will were at the seashore, Mr. and Mrs. Huntley had gone abroad, Dearie was busy preparing to go to the country and when Nellie could not come over, there was no one left to entertain her. It was such a change from the time when every one had been at her beck and call that she often felt very much forgotten and was frequently inclined to fret about it. She could not sew for her doll because her "felon-finger" was still covered with clumsy plasters and most of the games she liked to play required the use of both hands. Then, in the midst of her discontent came the remembrance of Dearie's birthday and instantly all her moodiness vanished in the fascinating excitement of preparing for the surprise she had planned.

Dearie had taken charge of the precious dollar at Dot's request because it seemed to be too great a fortune to be left unguarded, and ought not to be broken into for any celebration less important than papa's and mamma's coming home, so the dime was really all she could count on to defray the expenses of Dearie's party and Nellie's gift. It was certainly a problem.

She made a bargain with Katy for a fair exchange of labor by which she was to "answer" the trouble-

some basement bell for a whole day and in return Katy was to make her a cake with raisins and citron in it and white icing on top, for whoever heard of a birthday without a birthday-cake? Dot discovered, when she came to try it, that her part of the contract was no joke. It seemed to her that the bell never stopped ringing for a moment and she had not fairly gotten rid of one intruder before another appeared. The letter-carrier, the grocer, the butcher and the fishman: peddlars, tramps and people who wanted to know the number of the house and if Mrs. Somebody-or-other whom Dot had never heard of, lived here. They kept on in a steady stream all day long.

Dot had sometimes thought Katy was "cross" when she went down into the kitchen to ask her for an extra treat for Chiffon, but now she did not wonder at it. The distance from the kitchen to the basement-door seemed to grow and grow the oftener she had to cover it and by noon she felt she had walked uncounted miles, so often had she trotted back and forth. The butcher and the grocer and that sort of people were just tiresome; the peddlars were often irritating; the beggars were sometimes interesting, but the tramps were always alarming.

"You keep the iron gate tight shut until you know what they want," cautioned Katy, "and if you get nervous just you holler for me."

"O, I don't really get scared," Dot replied, stoutly. "But some of them don't look pleasant. Only one was really nice and I wished I could have given him something. He said he was a poor man who hadn't any wife or children to support him and that if it wasn't for what kind people gave him to eat he'd starve. He was interested in Chiffon and asked me about him and he remarked complimentary things about my hair and called me 'little lady.' It seems pitiful that he should be a tramp, he's so polite."

Katy sniffed. "Altogether too polite," she returned. "I wisht I'd been there to see him."

"Why?" asked Dot.

"O, I don't know. I'd have liked to see what such a dreadful polite man looked like."

"I can tell you just how he looks," cried Dot, eager to satisfy her curiosity. "His hair was sort of red and curly and he had freckles all over his face and he limped. But he wasn't very ragged or dirty either."

"Well, you try an' remember him so you'd know him again if you saw him," instructed Katy, and then

she put some dishes on the dumb-waiter and told Dot she could run up-stairs now because luncheon was ready.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW FRIEND

DEARIE declared it was the most delightful surprise she had ever had in all her life. In the first place the nursery was "all darkened up" with shutters closed and shades drawn. Two wax candles slightly warped by the heat shed a mysterious and beautiful glow upon a festive-looking table in the centre of the room. The table was covered with a fine white cloth which only a too-inquisitive person would have discovered was a towel, and on it were displayed a superb birthday cake with icing on top and citron and raisins inside; a splendid lamp-mat made by weaving worsted through a spool and sewing the result of the operation round and round on itself, pan-cake shape; four beautiful spools of sewing silk (they came four for five cents because they were a little soiled on the outside but that did not matter since it was easy to pull the dingy part off) and a most elaborate book-mark made of perforated cardboard and ribbon. Dearie was deeply touched by the thought of all this richness be-

ing for her and Dot quite glowed with satisfaction as she saw how much her efforts were appreciated. Nellie stood by assisting the hostess to "receive," and every time Dearie grew enthusiastic over her treasures she and Dot would nudge each other and laugh delightedly from sheer gratification over the success of the celebration.

"I never had such a happy birthday," declared Dearie as she gazed down affectionately upon her gifts and the glowing face of their maker. "It is astonishing how you have managed to think of just precisely the things I really ought to have. That lamp-mat will be so useful! And the book-mark! What a beauty it is! And such remarkable silks! I never saw more brilliant shades! Magenta and green and purple and yellow! I should never in the world have thought of buying them and now if I should need them it will be so convenient to have them in the house!"

Dot was enchanted. It seemed she had succeeded even beyond her dearest hopes. And in the excitement of the moment she had forgotten one of the most important features of the entertainment. She made a dash for the table and brought forth a parcel very daintily tied with a braided cord made of ma-

genta, green, purple and yellow silk strands, and handed it to Nellie.

“O goody!” said Nellie, much surprised by her unexpected share in the program.

Dot hopped up and down while Nellie untied the string and took the cover off the mysterious box.

“Why, Dot Brooke!” cried Nellie, “whatever under the sun do you mean? You’re not giving me all your silks? The very best ones you’ve saved up and been so proud of? Why, I never! The ones your Aunt Bessie gave you and all? That beauty white silk with the pink roses on it, just like painting that you said was going to be made into a best ball-dress for your new doll?”

“Look more! Look more!” shouted Dot ecstatically.

Nellie dived deeper into the treasure-trunk and came to a hard little package wrapped up by itself. “What can it possibly be?” she repeated again and again as she struggled with the strings. It was a porcelain doll with jointed limbs and a head of golden hair, just the very thing Nellie had been longing for and it was only a little smaller than the one she had given Dot.

“I wish it was bigger,” said Dot apologetically as

Nellie clapped her hands in delight. "But I hadn't but five cents to spend and so I made it up on the silks and now we can play house together and it will be perfectly even for, you see, your doll won't be so big as my doll and mine won't have as nice clothes as yours."

The two wax candles had, up to this time done their duty bravely, but now the warm enthusiasm of the company or something else must have affected them so strongly that all at once their hearts melted within them and with a last weak flicker they collapsed entirely and had to be blown out.

The party had proved such a brilliant success however that a little accident such as this could not dim its luster even though the birthday-cake had to be eaten in common, unromantic daylight. Dearie opened the blinds and a fine draught of fresh air came wafting in.

"The wind has changed," she said. "And we'll have a comfortable night and probably a cool day tomorrow to travel in."

"I just hate to have you go away," declared Nellie in a sudden burst of good-feeling.

"But you're going yourself, next week."

"I know it, only it won't be to the same place and

the girls that'll be there won't be half as nice as you are."

Dot shot a radiant look at Dearie. This praise from reticent Nellie repaid her for all her trouble and sacrifice.

The next day Ellen pulled down the green window-shades and shut the inner blinds tight, Katy saw that the kitchen region was safe and fast and bolted the area-gate and Dearie turned the key in the front door and locked it behind them.

They were off to the country!

Chiffon behaved, all things considered, very well in the cars. To be sure, he barked indignantly at the conductor every time he attempted to examine their tickets and sat up and begged most shamelessly for chicken when the boy with the sandwiches went his rounds, but with these exceptions he was a model dog and his little owner was proud of him.

The color which had faded from Dot's cheeks during her sickness returned before her first week in the country was over. Such glorious times as she had, riding on top of the towering hay-loads and wading in the shallow brook! learning to climb cherry-trees and reveling in the feasts she had among the loaded branches. She found an oriole's

nest hanging from the lowest bough of a young apple-tree in the orchard and it was great fun to watch the wonders which took place in that curious little home. First the pretty delicate eggs, and then the ugly, skinny little birds with their big yellow mouths continually open and yawning for food. But gradually a soft down began to appear on the naked bodies, the bright eyes opened and peered out at the gay green world of apple-branches above and then, just as the little creatures were getting "too cute for anything" lo! one day they were gone and the nest hung empty and forsaken.

Dot had known of course that the babies would fly away as soon as they were strong enough to try their wings but when the time actually came she felt sadly lonesome and forlorn.

Chiffon followed her everywhere, through deep sand and tangled underbrush and Dearie found it next to impossible to keep the briars out of his curly coat. But regularly every afternoon when Dot was freshly dressed in a clean white frock he was thoroughly brushed and combed and adorned with a coquettish ribbon tied in a butterfly bow just back of his ears and they went forth together looking like two of the most model young creatures imaginable,

quite incapable of doing anything mischievous or disobedient.

But appearances are deceitful and at the moment that Chiffon was looking most innocent and guileless, temptation overtook him and he yielded.

It was Peter, the next-door dog who suggested the adventure. Dot had warned Chiffon again and again against Peter, saying he must not play with him because Peter was a low-bred ill-behaved creature up to all sorts of dangerous pranks and he would surely lead Chiffon into trouble if he did not look out. But there was an air of rollicking boldness about Peter that was simply alluring to Chiffon and whenever he saw an opportunity he would slip away for a bark and a run with his fascinating friend.

“Ki-yi!” Peter had exclaimed with a grin of derision when he first saw the dainty terrier. “Here comes a dear little dog—all dressed in white. Mamma’s precious puppy! gentle as a lamb! Look out, darling, and don’t muss your pretty curls!—Ow-wow!”

Now what could have been more humiliating than this? To think that his appearance which had, up to now, been a source of pride to him and had always attracted so much flattering attention should be the

cause of bringing down upon him such contempt and scorn as this! He felt all his vanity deserting him. His dignity was crushed and he thought dismally that he would never be able to hold up his tail again.

Peter broke into a loud "Ki-yi! Ow-wow!" as Chiffon slunk meekly back across the lawn and into the shelter of Dot's arms. All the afternoon he brooded over his wrongs and was glad when he heard some one refer to Peter as "that cur." But the next morning he found himself looking through the hedge into Peter's yard with eager, wistful eyes, longing, in a shamefaced, foolish sort of way, that the other dog would come down off the porch steps where he was lazily snapping at flies and notice him—even if it were only to grin and call "Ki-yi" at him again. But Peter treated him with silent contempt and once more Chiffon slunk away downcast and forlorn. When Dearie began to comb and brush his flossy coat that afternoon he protested vigorously and almost squirmed out of her lap in order to escape the coquettish ribbon-bow which had always been his pride before. The fact of the matter was he wanted to recommend himself to Peter and if Peter disapproved of spotless white and dainty adornments why he would do his best to avoid them. As it happened

however he could not avoid them for Dearie was firm and not to be turned from her purpose. But Peter must have gathered Chiffon's intention by some means or other for though he grinned at him later as he passed him on the road, the grin was a tolerant sort of affair and followed up by a sidelong wink which set Chiffon's heart to beating with rapture and delightful agitation.

After that the two of them struck up quite a friendship on the sly and whenever it could be secretly managed the terrier would slip through the hedge and visit his beguiling companion.

"Never give you meat?" repeated Peter one day when he and Chiffon were having a heart-to-heart talk on the further side of the veranda-steps, out of view of Dot's house. "Why, I never heard of such a thing. What do they give you I should like to know? Pap?—Ur-r-r Yap!"

"Oh, well,—not exactly—only ——"

"But if it isn't meat it must be pap. Pooh! I wouldn't put up with it if I were you. And they never let you loose in the street either? Hi-yi—Guy! What a row I'd make!"

Chiffon pretended he was blinking at a fly and made a great show of shaking the hair out of his eyes,

but as a matter of fact he was having all he could do to keep the tears back and to hide his degradation from the bold Peter.

“I tell you what it is,” said Peter after a short silence. “Did you ever see that white cart with big black letters on it that goes past every day?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Well, that cart is the butcher’s wagon.”

Chiffon waited. He was acquainted with Peter’s peppery temper by this time and he knew that questions only annoyed him. When he got good and ready he would proceed and tell all he wanted to.

“Well, what do you say to slipping off by ourselves some day and following the cart and having a great time with all the beef and liver and bones we want?”

“O-o, Pe-ter!” sighed Chiffon, his breath coming quick with excitement.

“We could do it, if only you had a grain of pluck and weren’t a poor-spirited little ‘mamma’s baby-dog.’”

“I ain’t!” snapped Chiffon.

“Well, then, you just watch for me and the next time I spy the butcher’s cart I’ll give you a sign and then, if the coast is clear we’ll put for the road along

by the bushes where they can't see us and before you know it we'll be having a feast such as you never ate in all your born days. I've been there before many a time and I know all about it! It's an old story to me but of course I'm a dog of spirit and experience and have seen a lot more of life than you have, but I don't mind showing you how the thing is done if you have spunk enough to try."

So the plan was made and Chiffon promised faithfully to await the sign from Peter and, when it came, to respond to it at any cost.

"If you don't, after I've gone to all the trouble of making the arrangements," threatened Peter, "I'll never bow to you again as long as I live."

"O you needn't be afraid," Chiffon reassured him gallantly.

But Chiffon was not altogether happy in his mind these days. In spite of Peter's fascinations and the promises of sport he held out, there was something about him which was disquieting and worrisome. Still, the foolish little terrier clung to him telling himself that Peter was the bravest and most honest of dogs, greatly to be admired and much to be sympathized with for the way the neighbors abused him. He never allowed himself to acknowledge that

Peter's courage was merely rashness and that his independence was pure unruliness. He let Peter mislead him and alas! he had to take the consequences.

CHAPTER X

TELEGRAMS

DOT was sitting on the veranda steps playing jack-stones by herself and Chiffon was squatting beside her looking on with the greatest interest. They were both freshly dressed for the afternoon and looked as crisp and spruce as if there were no such things in the world as burrs and briars or mud-pies and grass stains.

“There! You see I’ve put ‘the chickens in the coop’ and it’s awfully hard,” murmured Dot. “Now you watch me put ‘the horses in the stable.’ I hold my hand this way and then—I catch this jack and shove him in there—so—and then I catch this one—and shove him there—so—and then——” She was so absorbed in her game that she did not notice that a wagon had turned in at the gateway and was going round the drive to the back of the house. But Lucy, the cook, was on the lookout for the butcher and she welcomed him with the heartiest of smiles.

“Well, I thought you really had gone back on us this time,” she said with a good-natured wink. “I says to Mary, says I, ‘Mr. Emmons is the dependablest

meat-man I know,' I says. 'If he passed his word to bring us fresh calves' liver for our supper to-night he'll keep his promise,' says I. 'He won't leave us in the lurch with all them boarders and things to provide for,' I says, 'and not a thing to give 'em unless he's as good as his word,' says I. So when you didn't come in the morning as usual nor yet this afternoon and Mary was for conjuring up something with smoked beef an' eggs, I says, 'No, not yet, Mary. You wait a bit longer and Mr. Emmons'll be here, sure,' I says."

"Well," responded the butcher genially, "and here I am. I started to go my rounds this morning as customary, but before I got more'n half through, a man stopped me on a matter of a calf he wanted to sell. It was a special chance and I had to take it or leave it on the spot. I took it, and that's what kep' me so late. I had to go eight miles out to get the creetur and it delayed me till now. But 's long's I'm here in time no bones 's broke."

Lucy laughed and Mr. Emmons hurried away, for he was tired and hungry and was anxious to get home to his own supper. Neither he nor any one else noticed the short, sharp "Yap" that sounded faintly from the hedge as his cart drove into the grounds,

and now, as it drove out again, no one noticed the clumsy yellow-and-black form of a mongrel that slipped through the shadows of the tall bushes by the wayside.

Dot put "the horses in the stable," and "the chickens in the coop." She "rode the elephant" and jumped "the pig over the stile," and by and by it was supper time, and she had to lay her jack-stones aside for a while.

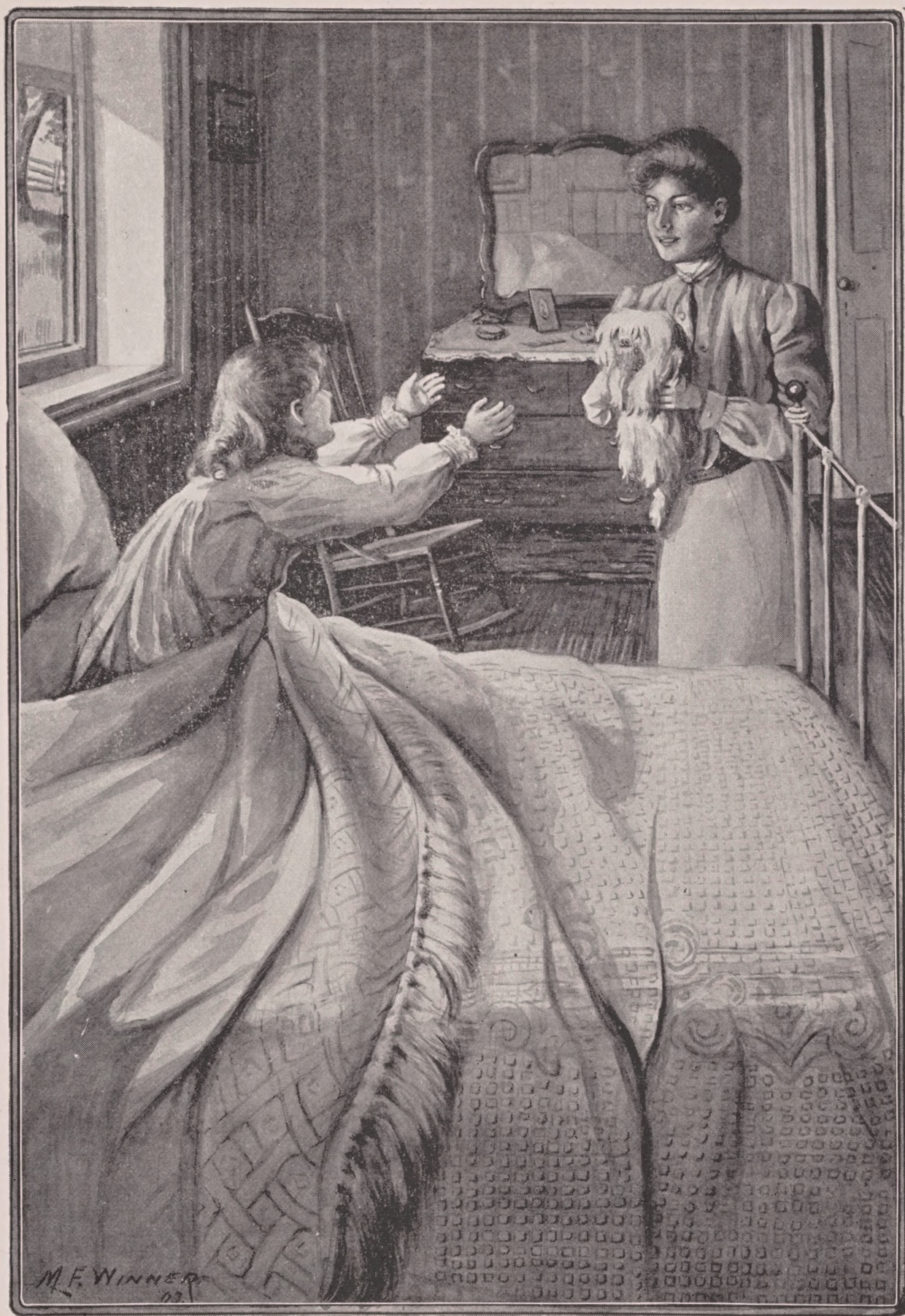
They were half through the meal before she noticed that Chiffon was missing. Even then she was not alarmed, because she had seen him but a few minutes ago, when she was playing jacks on the veranda, and nothing could have happened to him in the meantime. He certainly was somewhere about, especially since there was the smell of fried liver in the air. But neither the alluring meat nor her patient search and constant calling served to bring him to light, and after a while the members of the household volunteered to act as a rescue party, and explored the neighborhood high and low until it became quite plain that the hunt would have to be given up for the night.

Dearie persuaded Dot to go to bed at last, but the little girl was so distressed that it was hours before

she could compose herself to sleep, and when she finally succeeded in closing her eyes she was quite exhausted and slept heavily through the rest of the night and long after the breakfast-gong had sounded. What waked her at last was the opening of her bedroom door, and Dearie's voice calling her name almost before she had entered the room.

"Dot! Dot! Chiffon is found! See, here he is, dear! In my arms, safe and sound!"

Dot was broad awake in an instant—sitting up in bed with wide open eyes and arms stretched out to welcome back the runaway. But when Dearie gave him into her hands she started back in amazement, for she hardly knew the little dog, so strange and unfamiliar he looked. His flossy white coat was smeared with mud, and tufts of hair were matted together here and there in hard, discolored snarls. The ribbon about his neck was bedraggled and stained with blood, while he seemed to have been thickly peppered all over with sawdust. His gallant little air had vanished with his fine appearance, and he held his tail close to his hind legs in a shrinking, guilty way, which said as plainly as words: "I've been naughty, missy. I know it, but please don't punish me this time. I've been through



"CHIFFON IS FOUND"

such a lot. I really don't feel as if I could bear up under any more trouble."

"Where have you been, Chiffon?" demanded Dot as sternly as she could speak.

Chiffon hung his head and Dearie answered for him.

"Mr. Emmons brought him back just now. He must have followed the cart yesterday—he and that horrid Peter from next door. They were both in the shop this morning when Mr. Emmons opened it, and a quantity of his best meat is simply ruined, for they made a night of it and chewed up everything in sight. Mr. Emmons says he has often seen Peter skulking about and has beaten him off repeatedly, so he never got anything before, but he and Chiffon must have stolen in very quietly last evening when he wasn't aware, and he never suspected they were about until a few hours ago. By that time they had gotten into a fight and Peter was giving Chiffon a fearful mauling, when he came in and put a stop to it. He caught Peter and flogged him soundly, but he let Chiffon go with a couple of sharp smacks, because he says all that meat will surely make him terribly sick, and is likely to give him all the lesson he needs without any other punishment. From what he says, and from

what the dog-fancier in town told us, I'm afraid we are going to have a wretchedly ill bow-wow on our hands."

And a wretchedly ill bow-wow Chiffon proved to be. He wailed and whimpered piteously all day, now shaking with chills and now stiffening with cramps, and nothing gave him any relief until Olaf, the stableman, took him in charge and almost strangled him with a nauseous dose of medicine, which at the time he thought would kill him, but, on the contrary, really cured him after a while.

Dot and Dearie nursed him tenderly, and toward evening, when the pain finally vanished, they wrapped him up snugly in shawls and left him to sleep off his attack in the warmth and shelter of his own cozy basket, a sadder and a wiser dog.

Peter, across the hedge, howled dismally all night, but the only attention he received came in the form of a heavy boot which some one hurled at him from an upper window because he disturbed their rest. Peter's thoughts were very bitter.

"That's the way it always is," he snarled. "I get nothing but cuffs and hard words, and that little simpleton next door is coddled most to death. People are very unjust and cruel and harsh in this world.

Here am I, a brave, courageous dog, with all sorts of bright ideas as to how the earth ought to be run and I am beaten with a cudgel—(that ugly butcher!) Ow-wow! but won't I bark at him after this and run at his horse's feet and try to snap at 'em and frighten him into running away? Ow-wow! Won't I just? And the butcher—he never more than touched that silly little pup from next door, although he was quite as much to blame as I was—for even if I did suggest the plan he followed on quick enough, and now he's being petted and nursed and I'm out here all a-l-o-n-e!”

“Dear me!” murmured Dearie to herself, vainly trying to sleep, “I do wish that miserable Peter would stop howling. There! Some one has thrown something at him! Now, perhaps he will be quiet and give us a little peace! No, there he is at it again, louder than ever! It almost seems as if he were barking at some one. I wonder if it could be possible that a stranger is about the place. There! I am almost sure I heard a step on the gravel—and now one on the veranda. Oh, dear! I wonder if I ought to alarm the house! It might be a burglar—but a burglar would not knock on the door,—and that certainly was a knock on the door. There goes another! Whoever it is evidently wants to get in.”

Dearie rose softly, slipped on her woolen slippers and flannel gown and went to the window. The moon was shining brightly. She could see Peter standing beyond the hedge, tugging fiercely at the end of his long chain and barking hoarsely and hungrily, his heavy jaws snapping viciously every now and again at the chain which was imprisoning him. The roof of the veranda hid the front door upon which the stranger, whoever he might be, had been knocking, and though Dearie leaned far out and bent far over she could not manage to see over the edge.

"Perhaps I am mistaken after all," she thought, when she had spent a moment in intent listening, without hearing the slightest sound beyond the moving of the branches in the wind and Peter's distressing serenade, but just as she was assuring herself that her fancy had played her a trick, she distinctly heard another knock, sharp and clear, ring out upon the panel of the door. She did not delay any longer, but hurried down-stairs and opened the door as far as its chain would permit.

"Who's there?" she asked through the discreet opening.

"Telegram!" replied a husky voice from the outer step.

Dearie slipped the chain and flung the door wide. The light from the hall-lamp was clear enough to enable her to read the name of the person to whom the dispatch was directed. It was her own. For an instant her heart stood still. Thoughts of danger to Dot's mother thronged to her mind. With trembling fingers she tore open the envelope. The message was a short one—only a few words, yet for a moment it made her breath come hard and her eyes grow dim :

“Bessie very sick. Can you come?”

“WILLIAM BROOKE.”

That was all. But it was enough to send her flying like the wind to her room, where she wrote the reply. Dot's young uncle was feverishly waiting and hoping to receive.

“Will start at once. Keep up good courage.”

In a moment more the messenger was trudging on his way back to the village again and Dearie was dressing herself hastily, meanwhile thrusting a few of the most necessary of her things into a bag. In the stable the horse was being harnessed in order that she might be taken to the railroad station to catch a midnight train.

“I am sorry,” she whispered to Mrs. Francis, the housekeeper, whom she had aroused, “but I am afraid I must leave Dot in your care. Mrs. Brooke is very sick, and I cannot take the child with me because she would only be an extra responsibility, and I shall not be able to spare a thought from her aunt. Will you explain to her in the morning how it is, and tell her to be a good girl and take care of Chiffon, so that when I come back I may find them both safe and well?”

The housekeeper promised. . Dearie snapped the lock of her bag, fastened the clasps and then, with a last look at Dot who was sleeping soundly through all the commotion, so thoroughly tired out had she been by her night and day of anxiety over Chiffon, she hurried down-stairs and was driven rapidly away.

And through the rest of the night the rushing train carried her flashing over the dreary miles of her journey until at length when the sun was high and the world astir again, she found herself upon an unfamiliar station-platform looking into Uncle Will’s white, pinched face and hearing his hollow voice say chokingly :

“Thank you—for coming. She would be grateful—if she knew. She was so lonely—with no one of her

own, I mean no woman she loved—to turn to. She's just alive—that's all," while he led her to the carriage which was to take her to where Aunt Bessie lay, sick, suffering and in need of her.

And Dot?

When she woke and found Mrs. Francis standing beside her bed instead of Dearie, and heard the story she had to tell, the sun seemed suddenly to go out of the sky, leaving the day dreary and cold and forlorn.

CHAPTER XI

PADDLING HER OWN CANOE

THE people in the house were very kind to Dot when they learned what had happened. Mrs. Francis offered to help her dress and to give Chiffon his bath in Dearie's stead. Mrs. Jardine, one of the boarders, invited her to make herself quite at home in her room and Miss Evans, another, said she would be glad to have her "trot along" when she went out for her daily walks. Dot said, "Oh, thank you ever so much," to each of the kind offers, but she did not intend to accept any of them. She had a great plan in her mind and she meant to carry it out so that when Dearie came back she would be astonished and delighted and would realize that Dot was fully able to take care of herself without anybody's help at all. She would miss Dearie of course, but after the first shock had passed of finding herself alone, Dot thought it would be great fun to "play lady" and feel independent and free to come and go where she pleased without having to ask any one's permission or advice. She did not know that she began to toss her head and

carry her chin in the air as she dwelt on her own importance and the impression she was going to produce upon the household by her capability and self-reliance.

As soon as breakfast was over she smuggled Chiffon into the deserted laundry and prepared to give him his bath in the most approved fashion. But she found it unexpectedly hard work to tug the pails of water from the pump outside and when, at length, she had successfully managed this part of the operation her arms were so tired that she scarcely had strength to accomplish the rest. Chiffon struggled violently against the shock of his ice-cold plunge but she held him firmly down in spite of his whimpering and shivers, having quite forgotten that Dearie always took the chill off first with some hot water straight from the kettle.

“Keep still, Chiffon, naughty dog!” she whispered irritably. “I’m doing it all just exactly as Dearie does and you’re having a beautiful bath. You ought to be ashamed! Just see all this lovely tar-soap I’m putting on you! At first it makes your hair brown like this and then when I rub it in, it turns into a nice, white, bubbly foam just like the eggs Lucy beats up for icing—only—only—it doesn’t seem to be doing it. It just keeps on being sticky and brown and

thick. There now! you mustn't try to jump out! Keep still and behave. I'm only trying to rinse you off, you silly. Now I'm going to wrap you up, all comfy like this in your ownty-townty bath-towel and when you're dry your hair won't mat down like this any more; it'll all fluff out as it always does and you'll be just as pretty as if you hadn't been a naughty puppy and got yourself all messed up at the butcher's yesterday."

But Chiffon did not believe her in the least. He knew perfectly well that something was wrong and he was very low in his mind in consequence. He always had dreaded being scrubbed, but this time it was worse than he had ever known it to be before. Oh, how cold it had been! It made his skin shrivel just to think of it! Even when he didn't think of it it made his skin shrivel! And oh dear, oh dear! why couldn't he shake his coat dry and loose and free as it usually was? He didn't like this way of wearing it at all: plastered down close and fast to his skin so his very bones seemed to crack whenever he tried to stretch. Whatever in the world had happened to him anyway? He was certainly drying, but the drier he became the harder and tighter his flesh felt—and it was getting worse and worse every minute. He knew

he had been a naughty dog (he confessed it frankly) to run off so with Peter, but he had said he was sorry and he had thought he had paid his penalty yesterday when he felt so deathly sick in his little inside. But evidently that was only the beginning of his punishment and now it was striking out to the surface. Oh dear, oh dear! He almost wished he had never been born!

Meanwhile Dot, after settling Chiffon in the sunshine to dry, hurried back to the laundry to put the place in the order in which she had found it, for Dearie always made a point of doing so and Dot was determined to follow her example in everything as closely as she could. But her earlier struggles with the pump and Chiffon had about exhausted her strength and when she began to bail out the tub she found her hold of the bucket was weak and unsteady. At last she had to give up trying to use a pail because it was so heavy to lift, but ladling the water out by the dipperful threatened to "take all night" and she was heartily sick of staying in the "old laundry" all by herself with no one to talk to, not even Chiffon. There ought to be some quick and ready way of doing it. When Dearie did it, it looked "as easy as pie." Like the youth in the "Jabberwocky" Dot "stood awhile

in thought." Suddenly she made a dash at the tub. She had found a quick and ready way and it was to tilt the tub over a "weenty, teenty bit" and let the water run out into the bucket which she could then manage somehow to tug out of doors. She pushed the tub back an inch or two using all her strength to accomplish it and then, when she had managed so far, she began gently to tip it forward. But either the bench on which it stood was slippery or the water in the tub dashed forward too violently, upsetting the balance, but, however it was, Dot felt her arms jerk forward suddenly as they were dragged by the weight of the lurching tub and the next minute she found herself sitting on the floor drenched to the skin while over the boards of the laundry rushed a regular torrent of tar-soap water. Lucy rushed out of the kitchen to see what the tremendous crash and splash meant and when she saw Dot sitting soaked and wild-eyed in the midst of the deluge she just put her hands on her hips and laughed till she choked.

"O mercy me!" she groaned. "If this isn't paddling your own canoe with a vengeance!"

That was the last straw! To be ridiculed and made fun of when she was trying so hard to be dignified and was all tired out and discouraged into the

bargain! She leaped to her feet, flashed a look of hot, speechless anger at Lucy and rushed from the place in a perfect passion of resentment and mortification. She had sense enough left to shrink from attracting attention on the way up-stairs and she fairly choked back the great sobs which were tearing at her throat, but when she reached the threshold of her own room and thrust open the door her control gave way and she burst into a loud, sharp cry. The sound waked Chiffon from his nap and he sprang up immediately to see what this new misfortune meant. But his coat was more uncomfortable than ever and he could only stalk stiffly and rigidly across the room when his instinct was to reach his missy at a bound. He did not bear any malice against her on account of the bath; he had slept off the first keen edge of his wrath and now he just wanted to make up and be friends again and forget that it had ever happened. But when Dot, who had cast herself bodily upon the floor in a huddled, wet bunch of misery, felt his sympathetic little tongue upon her neck she stretched out her arm glad to gather the only friend she had left to her heart, and to pour into his attentive ears the history of her woes. But at the first glimpse of him she shrank back. Her tears stopped instantly, she gave a

great gulp of horror and sat bolt upright. Her first thought was that this was not Chiffon at all—this lank, dirty-looking animal whose discolored hair was plastered close to his hide in a harsh, stiff mat. But the familiar appealing look in his eyes convinced her and she recognized him for her pet in spite of his dreadful transformation. But what was the matter? How had he grown like this? Would he never be his own pretty, bright, white self again? It could not be possible that the bath she had given him had brought about this terrible change! And yet he had been all right before—abominably dirty to be sure, but not, oh not like this! She forgot that she herself was dripping from head to foot, in the awful thought that Chiffon might be ruined for life.

Mrs. Francis, who had just heard of Dot's accident from Lucy and who had come up-stairs to offer her assistance, almost laughed outright at the sight which met her eyes as she noiselessly pushed open the door of Dearie's room.

Dot was sitting on the floor in the middle of the room, her hair hanging about her cheeks in lank, wet strands, her soaked clothes making a pool about her,—the most melancholy looking little object imaginable! while in front of her squatted Chiffon, a very

caricature of a dog, staring straight into her horror-stricken eyes with a doleful, apologetic air which was fairly convulsing.

But Mrs. Francis was wise as well as kind and she knew better than to give way to her impulse as Lucy had done. Instead, she came softly over to where Dot was crouching and said gently and quite in a matter-of-course sort of way :

“I just dropped in to see how you were getting along, my dear. It’s very close on dinner-time and I suppose you’ll want to freshen up a little bit for the table and those buttons at the back are awkward to fasten oneself when one isn’t used to them,” and in a moment more Dot found herself pouring out the whole story in the good woman’s arms.

“Why, it’s nothing at all,” Mrs. Francis assured her comfortingly. “You mustn’t mind! Lucy can mop up the laundry floor in no time and she didn’t really mean to make fun of you—you see she’s naturally an easily-amused sort of creature—the least little thing sends her into a fit of laughter. And now we’ll have you in fresh dry things in a twinkling and then no one except ourselves will ever be the wiser.”

“But Chiffon ——” wailed Dot still incredulous.

“I tell you what I think is the matter with him,”

returned her friend. "You used the water from the pump for his bath and it is what we call 'hard': that is, the soap won't dissolve in it. I'm almost certain that if we give him another scrubbing after dinner and use water from the rain-barrel for it, as your Aunt Dearie does, he'll be as good as new again. Shall we try it?"

"Yes, O yes, if you please!" returned Dot eagerly from out of the towel with which Mrs. Francis was drying her hair.

So Chiffon was hidden away in Dearie's room during dinner in order that he might not be seen in his present absurd condition to be laughed to scorn by unsympathetic boarders, and after the meal was over Mrs. Francis and Dot disappeared with him into the laundry from which he emerged in all his old-time glory of spotless skin and flossy white curls.

Dot was so relieved and delighted that she almost forgot the humiliation of the morning but Mrs. Francis noticed that though she still tried to do things for herself she was not quite so secure and overconfident as she had been earlier in the day.

As the afternoon shadows began to lengthen Dot found herself missing Dearie more and more and when the darkness actually came down she felt melan-

choly enough. Mamma and papa far away, across thousands of miles of ocean and land at the other side of the world! Dearie gone off in the night to stay, no one knew how many days, and bright little Aunt Bessie so sick that perhaps she would never get well! These were doleful thoughts, all of them, and they nearly overpowered Dot completely as she sat by herself in a corner of the veranda and brooded on them. She did not want to let any one see her shed tears, so she stole off by herself into a dark corner of the back entry, where she could nurse her woes in comfort and without fear of being disturbed. Chiffon was in her arms, and as she crouched down as far back in the shadow as she could get he snuggled close against her with a comforting sort of sigh as much as to say:

“Cheer up, cheer up! the worst is yet to come!”

But somehow or other, now that she was ready and waiting to grieve she felt much less like it than she had done on the veranda with all the grown-up people laughing and chatting around her, and the crickets chirping lonesomely in the grass beyond. Here it was snug and quiet and dark. With Chiffon cuddled close in her arms she did not feel left out in the cold, and so, before she realized it, she was fast asleep.

The grown-up people on the veranda kept up their laughter and chat until far on into the night, then, one by one, they disappeared up-stairs. Mrs. Francis, who had had a hard day, went into her room as soon as she had satisfied herself that the supper was properly served, quite forgetting in her weariness that she had promised Dearie she would see Dot safely in bed during her absence.

Lucy, Mary and Olaf, the hired man, talked together in the kitchen until the loud-voiced clock struck eleven, and then they, too, went to bed and by midnight the house was dark and still, with every soul in it fast asleep.

Suddenly Dot felt a queer touch upon her cheek: a soft, wet touch, and then she waked up enough to realize that Chiffon was pulling frantically at her sleeve.

"Stop, Chiffon, stop!" she murmured drowsily, trying to settle down comfortably on what seemed to be a particularly hard mattress. But Chiffon did not stop. On the contrary he tugged more excitedly than ever, and when this did not seem to be making much impression he gave a low, urgent "Wuh!" in her ear to arouse her.

"Oh, Chiffon, you're real naughty! What do you

want, I should like to know?" mumbled Dot, stupid with sleep.

"Wuh! Wuh!" repeated Chiffon persistently, tugging harder than ever at her sleeve.

"I'll put you out of bed if you don't stop plaguing so," Dot muttered crossly, and then, like a flash, it darted across her mind that she was not in bed herself—that she was—where was she? She sat up as straight as her cramped limbs would permit and was wide awake in an instant. The darkness about her was thick and strange; it weighed on her chest and hurt her eyes when she opened them. She struggled to her knees and pressed her hands over her mouth, for every stifling breath she drew hurt her. Chiffon had fastened his teeth in the skirt of her dress and was tugging at it fiercely. Little by little her brain was clearing. At last she remembered where she was—in the back entry—and Chiffon was trying to guide her out. She let him lead her through the horrible blackness, groping after him on all fours, and when she felt the rim of the kitchen threshold she got on her feet and turned the knob of the door. The next instant a cloud of dense and smothering smoke swept over her, and peering through it she saw in the distance, where the kitchen stove was, a slen-

der tongue of yellow flame leap high against the wall.

She closed the door with a bang and sank down upon the bare boards of the dark entry almost senseless from shock and smoke and terror. She knew now what Chiffon's warning meant.

The house was afire !

CHAPTER XII

AFTERWARD

It would have been the easiest thing in the world to lie still where she had fallen and never get up any more, for her bones felt as heavy as lead and her head was dull and swimming, but somehow, one clear, sharp thought kept pricking through her clouded brain and she could not escape from it.

“Tell! Tell! Tell!” it urged.

She struggled to get rid of it, for it irritated her, but when it persisted so obstinately she gave up in discouragement and began to crawl forward, baby-fashion, in what she felt was the direction of the dining-room. She had not far to go, and when she succeeded in opening the door the fresher air from the open windows beyond revived her at once.

“Tell! Tell! Tell!” repeated her thoughts and Chiffon gave another sharp and joyful “Wuh!” to emphasize them.

The hanging-lamp in the front hallway was kept burning all night and by its light Dot flew up-stairs

like a whirlwind, beating loudly at every door she came to and shouting "FIRE!" with all her might.

It was as if the change had been wrought by magic, for in an instant the quiet house was in an uproar. Men were shouting: women screaming and the general hubbub so excited Chiffon that he gave way to his emotions and barked like a little mad thing.

In a shorter time than it takes to tell it a line of people had formed from the well to the house and bucket after bucket of water was passed from hand to hand to be dashed upon the leaping flames. The tank in the attic was emptied and the rain-hogshead just outside the kitchen door was drained. Neighbors swarmed in from every direction, bringing blankets and ladders and proving a very capable fire-brigade. By three o'clock the danger was over.

"We should be thankful there was no wind!" said one.

"We never could have saved the house if there hadn't been so much rain lately," exclaimed another.

"What a blessing the fire was discovered so soon—before it had time to make more headway," declared a third.

The front lawn was littered with boxes and bundles and hysterical ladies in queer nondescript clothing.



SHE FLEW UPSTAIRS LIKE A WHIRLWIND

When there was no longer any doubt that the worst was over, these mysteriously disappeared, and in the morning it was discovered that everybody had been perfectly composed all through the danger and no one's presence of mind had deserted him for an instant.

"But what I want to know," said Mr. Jardine at the breakfast table, "is, who first gave the alarm? I was sound asleep when I heard something that sounded like a battering-ram on my door and I can't seem to remember whose voice it was that called 'Fire!'"

Nobody could answer him for apparently no one was any wiser than he.

Mr. Jardine rose, pushed his chair back and stood up in an imposing attitude behind it.

"Will the lady or gentleman who saved all our lives last night kindly oblige a grateful community by holding up his hand?" he demanded as if he had been an orator speaking from a platform.

It was a suffocating moment for Dot. She had always been afraid of Mr. Jardine because he made sport of everything and now his mock-sepulchral tone and absurd attitude convinced her that he was not in earnest and that he would only say something to make everybody laugh at her if she held up her hand and confessed she had given the alarm.

"I don't want to be made fun of," she thought again and again as she bent mutely over her plate. "Besides he said 'lady or gentleman,' he didn't say little girl, so I'm not really disobeying, for he hasn't specially told me I must do it. And honestly and truly Chiffon was the one anyway."

"It appears," said Mr. Jardine slowly, "that our hero of last night is of so modest and retiring a disposition that he prefers to remain a great unknown. I wish he wouldn't. Personally I'd like to thank him."

"Perhaps it was Olaf——"

"Or one of the kitchen-girls," suggested Miss Evans.

Mrs. Francis shook her head. "No, I've already asked them," she said. "I went down the first thing this morning to examine the kitchen-chimney to see how the fire started and neither Lucy nor Mary could tell me a thing about it. And as for Olaf, he confesses the first he knew of anything's being the matter was when he heard the church bell ring. I always go into the kitchen the last thing before I retire, so I can make sure everything is in order, but last night I omitted it else I'd certainly have seen something was amiss. I was unusually tired and to tell the truth it just

slipped my mind. I got into my own room as fast as I could and quite forgot—quite forgot—I do believe—I quite forgot something else too—something I had faithfully promised I would do. Dot dear, I meant to look in and see that you had everything you needed before I went to bed, and I declare I forgot all about it.”

Dot smiled faintly and looked guiltily down at her plate. But before she could attempt to say anything Mary, the waitress, stooped over and whispered something in Mrs. Francis’s ear.

Mr. and Mrs. Jardine, Miss Evans and all the rest instantly pricked up theirs.

“What is it?”

“Do tell us, quick!”

“You’ve got a clue!”

Mrs. Francis looked anxious and alarmed. “Mary says,” she declared, “that Dot didn’t go to bed at all last night. She says her bed hasn’t been slept in—that it hasn’t been disturbed. Dot, dear, what does it mean? Where can you have been?”

Dot’s cheeks were crimson.

“I—I,” she stammered shamefacedly, “I fell asleep in the back entry all dressed and—when—when the fire was over I was so tired—I—just didn’t remember

to take off my things and—and the sofa was real soft and—so ——”

For a moment Mrs. Francis's eyebrows were knit in a troubled frown. Then suddenly her face cleared.

“The back entry! You fell asleep in the back entry! right next to the kitchen. Then—then —— It must have been you that —— But child alive, how in the world did you ever manage to wake up and discover the fire? I should think the smoke would have smothered you. Why, I remember when I went down and opened the back entry door I was almost overcome by it. How did you ever find out in the first place?”

The questions came thick and fast, pelting Dot like hail-stones from all sides and making her turn from one to another until she was dizzy with her attempts to reply to every one at once.

“Chiffon waked me up—he tugged at my sleeve. No, not right away. At first I was too sleepy!—He kind of barked until he made me open my eyes!—Yes, it was awfully dark and I didn't know at first where I was, but I felt most choked and it hurt my eyes too. —Not very long. I guess it was only a little while, but it seemed long.—I don't know. I just felt I must tell.—The kitchen was thick with smoke. I couldn't

bear it when I opened the door. But I saw the fire—a big yellow flame—and it frightened me and I shut the door on it and then—for a few minutes I didn't know anything—I didn't notice. I just felt I must tell and so—and so—I got up, I mean I crawled to the dining-room door and then ——”

“Talk of miracles!” cried Mrs. Jardine wiping her eyes. “Just think of our owing our lives to this child!”

“Her instinct to close the kitchen-door was the miraculous thing! If she had left it open the draught would have made the fire spread twice as fast!”

“But her knowing enough to call us—one after another. I say that is simply wonderful!”

“Her own life was in terrible danger. Right there in the midst of that stifling smoke! The dog's waking her was Providential!”

“Oh, they're a pair of them—the kid and the puppy!”

Dot looked around in amazement. Apparently the dreaded “fun” she had feared was not being poked at her at all. Not one among them seemed in the least inclined to laugh at her—not even Mr. Jardine who seldom let an opportunity pass to jeer at something. On the contrary, far from looking mischievous the

“jokey-man’s” lips were twitching and his eyes looked strange and blurred. Dot quite forgot herself in the curiosity she felt in his strange appearance. What made him blink so and why did his hand tremble? Suddenly he pushed back his chair again, jumped up and stalked off to the window turning his back on them and saying in a choky sort of tone—quite as if he had smoke in his throat: “I say—I can’t get over it—a child like that! It knocks a man out!”

No one at the table spoke. Mrs. Jardine gazed steadily down at her plate and Miss Evans gave a nervous little cough. Chiffon saw his opportunity, made a dart for Mr. Jardine’s plate and cleared it of the few fragments of kidney that remained upon it in no time at all. Then he sat up straight in Mr. Jardine’s chair and waved his forepaws triumphantly. Mrs. Francis saw him and laughed, and that broke the spell. In an instant every one was talking and before she knew it Dot found herself and Chiffon surrounded by a clamoring crowd which proceeded to give them three cheers and “another for luck” at Mr. Jardine’s suggestion.

“Speech!—Speech!” he cried when the shouting stopped.

“Speech! Speech!” echoed Miss Evans.

"They want you to make a speech—to say something, dear," whispered Mrs. Francis in Dot's ear.

"About what?" asked Dot thoroughly confused and embarrassed.

"About last night. And—to thank them—and—and—everything."

"Speech! Speech!" repeated Mr. Jardine shuffling his feet upon the floor and making a great commotion.

Dot, standing in her chair, where she had been lifted by some one when the cheering began, clutched Chiffon tightly to her and hung her head.

"Go on!" urged Mrs. Francis at her elbow.

"I don't know what to say. It wasn't much anyway. Chiffon woke me—and—and I woke you—and that's all there was to it—and I—I thank you—for—for——" she paused and looked about from one to another with puzzled, anxious eyes. Mrs. Francis had told her to thank them, but she had forgotten to say for what.

"Chiffon woke me—and"—Dot repeated to fill in the pause, "and I woke you—and—I thank you for getting up."

The shout there was at this was simply deafening. Before it had died away Dot had slipped down from her high perch and had managed to escape.

It was strange how many pleasant things happened that day. Miss Evans took her for a long drive in her Meadowbrook cart in the morning and Mr. and Mrs. Jardine invited her to sail with them on the lake in their Naptha launch during the afternoon. Mrs. Francis gave her a pretty fan and Lucy baked her a little chocolate cake in a saucer all for herself while between them all she was fairly on the way to be spoilt by too much petting and attention. But it served to get her happily through the second day of Dearie's absence and by evening she had a letter which threw all the excitement of the last twenty-four hours quite into the shade.

In the first place it announced the joyful news that Aunt Bessie was better and that if she could be kept very quiet and obedient to the doctor's orders she would get well. At this point Dot had to get up and prance about the room to show how happy she was, but when she read on and learned that Aunt Bessie was longing so to see her that it had been decided it would do her more good than harm to have her wish gratified, she just clapped her hands and shouted with delight. As Dearie could not be spared from the sick-room Uncle Will was coming to take Dot back with him and, in the meantime, Mrs. Francis offered

to pack her trunk and get her ready for the journey the next day. But the letter was not all joyous, for toward the end Dearie wrote, "And I know that my Dot will be especially thoughtful and tender of Uncle Will just now and will not disturb him herself nor permit Chiffon to do so. She will be a cheer and comfort to him as well as to Aunt Bessie for they both are very sorrowful, and sadly miss the precious baby God lent them for an hour and then called back to Heaven again. It was a sweet baby, Dot. A little boy, and though he stayed with us so short a time, the house seems empty now without him. No one else can quite fill his place of course, but if you are very unselfish and considerate you can be a great comfort to us all. So come, my little girl and try."

CHAPTER XIII

STORIES

It was a long, long time before Aunt Bessie was well and during the first tedious weeks Dot had many a trial of patience. After the newness had worn off she found herself longing to get away—back to Mrs. Francis's where everything was gaily astir and there was always something pleasant going on. Here at Aunt Bessie's the house was still and hushed: nurses in white caps and aprons moved noiselessly and mysteriously to and fro and there was nothing for a small girl to do except keep perfectly still and be on hand when she was wanted to go into the sick-room and stay for a minute or two and then steal out again. Dearie was always in demand and Dot hardly got more than a glimpse of her all day long. Little by little, as the invalid improved, there was a change for the better in the household also but it was so gradual that it did not "count" at first and Dot could have cried many and many a time from sheer loneliness and discouragement. Even Uncle Will, who was usually

so bright and cheery, failed her these days, passing by with no more than an affectionate pat on the head or an absent-minded "Hello, Dot!" instead of the whole-hearted laugh and greeting she was accustomed to receive. Her dolls and games had all been left behind at Mrs. Francis's and she had nothing to amuse herself with except Chiffon and her own thoughts, which were anything but enlivening. But it was worth all the trouble and more to feel Aunt Bessie's thin fingers tighten about her own in welcome and to hear her weak voice whisper:

"I don't know what I should do without you, my Dot. It gives me courage just to look at your sunny face."

One by one, and slowly and slowly the long tedious days passed away. Then there came a sunshiny noon in September when a big chair was drawn close to the window of the sick-room and Aunt Bessie, well-covered in soft, warm wrappings, sat up surrounded by pillows and looked out into the light, bright world again. That was the beginning. Presently it was an old story to see her propped among her cushions on the couch and then it became quite natural to find her walking about the room and through the upper hall and chambers. But when she finally appeared down-

stairs Dot felt that life had begun all over again and that there might be lots of fun in it yet.

But by this time the days had begun to grow very short and the winds to get sharp and chill. The big log fire in the great hall-room was kept bright and glowing from morning till night and in the evening it was great fun to sit before it on the rug at Dearie's feet and listen to the stories she and Uncle Will and Aunt Bessie would "spin" for her amusement about what happened when they were young.

"I do not think I could have been more than seven," said Uncle Will one night, "when the thing I am going to tell you about took place. We lived rather far uptown in those days and a great part of the neighborhood was not what is called 'improved' as yet. But the city was growing fast. Houses were going up all about us and streets were being cut through on every side so that we boys had a fine time of it watching the men at work. It was one of our pet amusements to go across the street to the buildings opposite and frolic among the scaffoldings and open beams. But by and by, as the work progressed the scaffolding came down, the floors were laid and then the best of the sport was done. The rest of the fellows went off to play elsewhere, for it was 'no fun'

wasting time in a place which was perfectly safe. The excitement of the game lay in risking our necks, I suppose. But I still hung about. I had a special interest in machinery and when I saw a great piece of it hauled into the buildings one day I had to go over and investigate. The men explained it was a turning-plane: it was used to make the moldings for surbases and door-panels and they cautioned me to keep away from it. But, like a young simpleton, the first chance I got I disobeyed. It looked so easy—just to push a crank, press on a treadle with your foot and shove in a piece of wood. I chose a time when the men were up-stairs eating their lunch, and then I tried the trick. It proved perfectly easy—too easy in fact. The crank went down, and the wheel ‘went round like greased lightning.’ I shoved in my wood and it turned all right, in no time at all. The trouble was it turned so much faster than I had expected that I didn’t have a chance to take my finger out of the way and before I fairly knew what had happened the tip of it was neatly chopped off. The sudden pain and the sudden fright almost paralyzed me, but I had sense enough to take my foot off the treadle and to reverse the lever. I gritted my teeth and never made a sound. I was deadly afraid the men would know. The tip of

my finger hung by a thread. I pressed it back into its place and stumbled home, heaving with sobs and covered with blood. That's all there is to the story except that the finger actually grew together again and you'd never know it had been chopped at all but for this little scar and the slightly warped look it has at the end. But I can tell you this, Dot, it taught me to keep my fingers out of other people's machinery as well as other people's pie—at least until I understood the proper internal working of them."

"Did the workmen ever find out?" asked Dot breathlessly.

"Well, they didn't let on if they did and to tell you the truth I rather fought shy of those particular buildings after that. One of the fellows heard one of the men say I was 'a plucky young shaver' to get out of the place as I had, but somehow I never felt quite easy in my mind as to the flogging I knew I deserved. It seemed best not to go over there and deliberately remind them of it. Anyhow, I kept away. Did you ever hear that discretion is the better part of valor, Dot?"

"Now it's Dearie's turn," urged Dot, eagerly.

"Ready!—Go!" laughed Uncle Will.

"When I was about thirteen," began Dearie,

promptly, "mother and father took a long journey West and they decided to have my sister Rose go along. I was to be left at home; that is, I was to spend the year with the aunt of mother's for whom I had been named and who was very fond of me. Aunt Barbara lived in a large house and kept horses and carriages and was, altogether, a very stately and important personage but I was a lonely little girl with no one of my own age to play with and I soon grew peaked and ailing for lack of proper exercise and companionship. Aunt Barbara had never had any children of her own and could not understand my case at all, but she did the best she knew how and when I began to have a cough she decided I was preparing for an early grave. I had always been perfectly rugged and strong before but that did not appear to signify. Aunt Barbara decided I was a frail darling, too delicate for this world and that I ought to be shielded from every draught. So she smothered me in red flannels and sealskin and instead of being able to frolic about in the wind and snow as I had been accustomed to do I was taken out to drive in a closed carriage for an hour every day muffled up to the eyes in furs. I looked out wistfully through the closed windows and from the depths of my fur

and wished with all my might I were one of the jolly boarding-school girls whom I saw parading up and down the avenue every morning and who seemed to find their life such a particularly delightful affair. They were continually chattering and giggling among themselves and I longed and longed to have a share in the fun. Certainly I never confided to Aunt Barbara that I wanted to go to school but she must have guessed it for, lo, and behold! she told me one day I could go if I chose. I almost jumped out of my shoes and my pleasure only dimmed when I found myself actually in the place and face to face with the fact that I was that most uncomfortable of beings in the world, a 'new scholar.' The chattering, giggling girls I had envied turned sober and tongue-tied the moment they saw me or if they talked and laughed at all it was among themselves and pointedly leaving me out. I felt it in my bones that they were talking about me and before night I was almost ready to go back to Aunt Barbara's and the silent house and the hateful closed carriage. Almost, but not quite. Somehow even in those days, I could not endure the thought of letting myself be turned back by little things when I had once made up my mind to go on. So I stiffened my backbone and tried to look more cheerful than I

felt. After supper quite a lot of the girls gathered in my room and began to quiz me—to ask me questions which I knew they expected would tease me and to make remarks which I was just as sure they hoped would make me ‘mad.’ But I was determined I wouldn’t lose my temper. I would give them as good as they sent and then, at least they couldn’t flatter themselves they had conquered me. It was nearly nine o’clock when the great ‘retiring-bell’ rang. That ended the game. The girls in my room bade me good-night as if we had been friends all our lives and then left me to make the best of my lonely way to bed. I undressed slowly because I did so hate to realize how homesick I was and I knew it would come over me in a rush the moment I put out the gas. At last, however, I could not drag on any longer and had just turned down the light and gone to the door to place my pitcher outside for the maid to fill with hot water in the morning, when I heard a faint sound from the shadowy corridor and before I could decide what it meant something light and crisp struck me full on the cheek with the sharp stinging prick of a paper pellet. I was ‘mad’ enough to satisfy any one then. I shut my door with a quick jerk to escape any more attentions of the same sort, and turned up

the gas to see how much of a mark was left on my cheek. As I turned around from the mirror I spied a speck of white paper on the floor and something made me stoop down and pick it up. It was not crushed into the shape of a ball but rather, it was twisted into a screw as if it were one of the 'notes' we naughty girls were so fond of sending flying across the schoolroom when the teacher wasn't looking. I unfolded the crumpled scrap, and, sure enough, there was writing inside. It was a note.

“‘DEAR BARBARA :—

“‘Don't go to bed please until you have read this. The slats are all out of it and you'll go through on to the floor and crash. We girls did it for a joke on you and are sitting up waiting to hear it crash and then laugh. But you seem real nice after all and I'm sorry we did it. I did it as much as any one else and guess we all wish we hadn't, for you seem real nice after all. You see first-off we thought you were proud and horty 'cause you rode in a carriage and sealskin jackets and things and have a room all alone by yourself, but I guess you are real nice after all. If you'd like to, I'd like to have you sit next to me in the desk Laura Pelham had before she went home because her grandmother died.

“‘Yours lovingly,

“‘AGNES.’”

“Well?” demanded Dot when Dearie did not go on.

“That’s the end,” said Dearie.

“No, no ! Tell more ! Tell what the girls did the next morning when you didn’t crash. And tell what you did that night with nowhere to sleep ? ”

“Oh,” responded Dearie, “I wrapped myself up in a down-quilt and cuddled up on the pillows. I don’t quite remember how I did manage, but I got through the night somehow and the next morning when the girls enquired if my bed was comfortable I said I hadn’t asked it. Then we all shouted and became the best of friends on the spot.”

“O, goody ! goody ! ” cried Dot. “I’m glad you got the best of them, Dearie. I’m glad you were so smart ! ”

“I wasn’t smart at all,” returned Dearie. “I had only made up my mind to be good-natured and it paid, you see. Now it’s Aunt Bessie’s turn.”

Aunt Bessie gave her head a doubtful shake.

“I wasn’t ‘the-boy-stood-on-the-burning-deck’ kind of a little girl at all and what I am going to tell you will prove it, I am afraid. I was what people call ‘a case.’ At any rate I was up to all manner of mischief and my poor parents were almost distracted by my pranks. We lived out West in those days and though I did not know it at the time father was con-

sidered one of the ablest and most important men in Iowa. They were always sending for him to speak at their political conventions and he used to make frequent trips through the State on business connected with the government. Well, he was just about to start out on one of these expeditions when mother discovered me in some particularly astonishing scrape and declared then and there that she would not take the responsibility of looking out for me while father was away. Father took me aside and talked to me about my behavior. He said I was getting a big girl now and ought to know better than to act so and at last, in a reckless moment, promised he would let me have whatever I wanted most if, in return, I would give him my word I would turn over a new leaf and be a good and proper child in the future. Of course I didn't hesitate a minute. I would be the best girl that ever was I said, if he would take me with him where he was going. Poor father! he hadn't expected a proposition like this, when he made his bargain with me. But he was a man of his word then, as he is now, and he held to his contract though I know the prospect of what it might mean made him shake in his shoes. They packed my clothes in a fine, new satchel bought especially for me and when the

time came for father to start off I went with him. I don't remember much about the journey. It was 'lots of fun' to be able to sit before a little table spread with delicious things to eat and look out of the car-window between bites while the train was flying through the open country. And then, the hotels where we stopped, with their bustle and flashing lights and crowds of people! At first the importance of traveling alone impressed me tremendously, but by and by the novelty wore off and then the time hung heavy on my hands, especially when father was away and I was left to myself in our hotel-room with nothing to do but sit still and keep my word to 'behave like a lady.' But on the whole I did pretty well, and father was just congratulating himself on his luck when I spoilt it all and sent him home, what seemed to me then and for years after, a disgraced man. He left me one morning with the usual kiss and promise to be back soon and I settled down at once to wait for him and to plan what we'd do when the foolish 'old convention' was over and he would be free to give all his attention to the serious business of amusing me. Well, the hours dragged on slowly enough and by noon I had counted all the white horses in sight to say nothing of the red-haired girls.

I heard the clocks in the neighborhood strike twelve. Just to count the strokes made me feel hungry and when they gave a single one for half-past I felt emptier than ever. But one o'clock came and then two and three and still father didn't appear. By this time I was so drowsy I couldn't keep my eyes open. I don't know just how long I slept, but it must have been for a couple of hours or more for when I waked all the sunlight had faded out of the sky and still father hadn't come back. At first I was angry and then I grew frightened, but I did not give myself much time to think how I felt. I just got myself ready at once to go out and find him. I couldn't have been over six, but I walked out of the hotel as boldly as if I had been sixty, and began my search at once by asking where the convention was. Every one helped me and by following the directions of first one and then another I found my way to a great building which, when I peeped in, I found was packed with people from floor to gallery. But even the sight of such a crowd did not daunt me. If this was the convention it was where my father was and that was all I cared about. I squirmed in somehow and looked about. It was a stupid place. Just a lot of people sitting and listening to a man who was shouting at

them from a platform at the further end of the hall. There were flags and bunting festooned about the walls, but I don't think I cared about them much. All I wanted to see was my father's face, and though I kept a sharp lookout on every side I could not discover it anywhere. I suppose the audience was so interested in the speaker that it did not notice the little girl sidling up the crowded middle aisle. Anyway I squeezed and squirmed my way, wherever I could spy an opening, and at last I really managed to get toward the front. But I might as well have stayed at home for all the good it did me. Father was nowhere to be seen. Up to this I had not had the first doubt of being able to find him, but when I turned and looked over that sea of unfamiliar faces my faith in myself began to weaken and I felt a strange hollowness that was not altogether due to my dinnerless condition. Just at this minute, however, there was a rustle and stir among the audience, followed at once by a great hand-clapping and, in spite of my dismay, I turned around to see what it was all about. Pooh! Just another man had gotten up to speak. If you will believe me that was every single thing that had happened. I was disgusted. Still the people clapped and clapped and the new man bowed

and bowed and I stopped short to see if, by chance, he might be a wizard or magician or some one else worth while like that, who would do marvelous tricks to amuse us. As I was watching my eye happened to pass from him to the place in the row of platform seats behind him from which he had just risen. The empty chair looked bare and queer and made me think of the place in the front of my mouth where the tooth had lately dropped out. A second later I gave a great start, for directly beside the empty chair and in the one to the right of it sat my father. The people clapped on and the man continued to bow this way and that. But I did not pause to notice. I wriggled my way toward the platform and mounted the steps. By this time the noise had ceased but I hardly was aware of it. I just ran across that platform as fast as I could go, lest some one should stop me, meanwhile crying loudly so that that tedious man in front who was just beginning to speak wouldn't drown my voice :

“ ‘ Papa Huntley ! You said you'd come home soon ! And you didn't ! And how can I behave like a lady when I haven't had anything to eat since breakfus ? ’

“ And all I remember is—not ‘ friends flocking round ’ but my father's amazed eyes and then, sud-

denly, a great roar that seemed to sweep over the house from end to end. At first I thought the man in front had done a trick after all and I craned my neck to see it but he was looking round at us—father and me—and I found I was mistaken and that it was at us two they were laughing. Then, oh! how ashamed I was! I hid my face in father's shoulder and did not lift it again until we were out in the street. Even then I hardly dared look up into his eyes, but strange to say when I did they were not fierce at all. I had disgraced him for life I was sure, and it made me so sorry that I would have taken any punishment without complaining. But no punishment came and that is the end of the story, Dot, unless you'd like to know that I really did try to turn over a new leaf and behave like a lady after that."

CHAPTER XIV

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

SCHOOL had been "in" for many weeks when Dot went back to the city and she found herself hard pushed to keep up with her class. Dearie helped her with her lessons as much as she could but it was difficult to make up for lost time and some days when there were reviews she grew quite discouraged seeing how far the other girls were ahead of her. Suppose she were to be left behind at promotion time when Nellie and the rest would be advanced into the next grade. Even to think of it made her cheeks burn.

Dearie spent a great deal of time with Aunt Bessie nowadays and between them great things were doing. The little baby that had only lived an hour was to be the means of help to many other little babies whose lives were longer and harder than his had been, and his saddened young mother was finding comfort in providing for them out of a full heart which otherwise would have felt very empty.

There was nothing Mr. and Mrs. Huntley would

not do for their darling and when they came back from their travels and found how near they had been to losing her she seemed more precious than ever.

"Papa says," her mother declared the day after they reached home, "that he has thought it all over and he is going to give you a present, honey. He doesn't care how much it costs, he says, so long as it is what you want most and what will make you happiest. So now choose whatever you prefer.—Anything, it does not matter what. Papa will give you precisely what you say."

Aunt Bessie clapped her thin little hands.

"Really?" she asked.

"Really," said Mrs. Huntley.

"Then please tell him I want a baby-house."

"A—what?" Mrs. Huntley looked at Aunt Bessie for a moment as if she thought she might possibly have lost her wits. "A baby-house?"

Aunt Bessie nodded. "Yes, a baby-house," she repeated. "Since little Sweetheart died I've thought a lot about the poor, wretched small creatures down town that are born into the world to suffer and starve and have no one to look after them and love them. I know I can't do much to help, but it would make me very happy if I could feel I was doing a little to make

the poor mites better. If papa wants to give me the thing I'm longing for most he'll give me a home for these poor babies. Dearie and I have seen the very place. We've passed it ever so many times lately when we've gone to drive. It's a great, big rambling old house with acres of ground around it. It's frightfully old and shabby to be sure, but it could be put in order and then it would make a perfect place for the darlings to frolic about in. Just think what fun it would be to plan the improvements. You perfectly love to shop, Mamma Huntley, and here's your chance to buy all the things you can possibly think of, for I'm not going to be selfish about it—I'm going to let other people share in my lovely scheme. The owner of the place is anxious to sell and I'd rather have papa buy me that baby-house than anything else I can think of. Will he, O will he, do you think?"

That was the beginning. The house was bought and work begun on it within a week. Dearie and Mrs. Huntley were busy from morning till night, planning and preparing, fitting and furnishing, while Aunt Bessie sat by and tried not to fret because she wasn't strong enough as yet to do more than look on at the fun. At first Uncle Will and Mr. Huntley had

not taken much account of what was going on. They were glad to please Aunt Bessie by giving her what she wanted, but that was as far as their interest went. Little by little, however, they got drawn in in spite of themselves and by and by forgot to explain carefully to each other, "It's only to please Bess, you know," every time they happened to meet at the baby-house and discovered each other giving directions for new improvements and unexpected additions, and just let the real truth of it be known, that they were almost, if not quite as eager to see the thing a success as she was herself. Even outsiders caught the fever and Mrs. Carter not only joined in the work heart and hand on her own account, but set Nellie at it too for the benefit of "Aunt Bessie's babies."

"I'm going to learn how to crochet little sacks," said Nellie one day to Dot. "Mamma says she'll show me how. They'll be too cunning for anything, done in white split-zephyr in shell-stitch, with pink or blue borders and ribbons to match. And some'll be all white with white ribbons—as cute as can be."

"I wish I could make some too," said Dot wistfully.

"Well, why can't you?"

"'Cause I just have to study every minute to get

my lessons and then I can't get 'em, they're so hard. I don't want all the other girls to get ahead of me and be promoted and me have to stay back as if I were a dunce."

Nellie made no answer. Her conscience was urging her to say: "I'll help you, Dot. I know the lessons mostly all. I'm older than you and they seem real easy to me," while her selfish heart was saying, "I wouldn't do any such thing if I were you, Nellie Carter. If Dot was away from school it's not your fault. You're at the head of your class and that's all that need matter to you."

"Why don't you ask Dearie to help you?" she stammered out at last, fighting back both the inner voices with all her strength and trying to feel she was doing quite right.

"Oh, I—I—can't," confessed Dot sadly. "Besides she's so busy with the baby-house. I can't ever hardly tell folks what I'm thinking about and I only told you now 'cause you're my best friend—the girl I like the best of any. It's—it's awfully mortifying to have to let on you're a stupid," and hot tears of shame rose to Dot's eyes.

"Oh, pooh! I wouldn't care about that if I were you," said Nellie consolingly and then quite suddenly

she got up and hurried home, leaving her hostess wondering what had started her off in such a flurry. But the next afternoon she came back in the very best of spirits bringing her dainty wools with her and when her steel crochet-needle began to flash enticingly in and out of the soft zephyr shells, Dot was in despair. It seemed to her she could not endure it to sit there and see Nellie working for Aunt Bessie's babies when she herself was doing nothing at all. She tried to study but the lessons would not let themselves be learned and at last, with a smothered groan of discouragement she hid her face in her elbow and began to cry softly into her sleeve. Suddenly she felt two arms about her shoulders and heard a kind voice whisper in her ear:

"Don't cry, Dot. Please don't. I tell you what we'll do. We'll study 'em together. I know 'em almost all by heart. I'm older than you and they seem real easy to me. You're not a stupid—not the least bit. It's only 'cause you were away from school so long that you got behind. Now you see here! This is what we'll do! I'll come over here every afternoon or you can come to my house and we'll study our lessons together and I'll help you over the hard places. Then after we're done we can crochet on our

sacks and have some fun, for I know Dearie'll get you the things if you ask her to."

It was a great triumph for Nellie. Her books were easy enough to learn but when it came to lessons in generosity and self-forgetfulness she had to struggle quite as hard as Dot did over arithmetic and spelling. And now she had won! When the words were really spoken she felt a heavy load lifted off her heart. Her face grew bright, her eyes shone with happiness and she patted Dot on the shoulder in a motherly, comforting way that was quite as new and strange to her as it was to her friend.

They took up the bothersome books then and there and for two long hours bent over them dutifully. It was quite another matter to study this way, and somehow the puzzles seemed to straighten themselves out and the rough places to become smooth in a way that amazed and delighted Dot. Little by little as the weeks went by she found herself getting better marks at school and winning a higher place in the class. Thanksgiving came and went and it was time to think of Christmas. But in spite of all the merry bustle and jolly doings Nellie did not desert her.

"You're just the best friend in all the whole wide world," Dot declared one day. "Just think of my

being next to you—second in the class! Why, I tell you what it is, when Dearie writes to mamma about it she won't know what to do, she'll be so glad."

Nellie laughed. "Well, you've got as high as you can go, for you needn't think I'll let you get ahead of me, Miss Dot Brooke, so there!"

"As if I'd want to," exclaimed Dot. "I wouldn't do it if I had the chance."

"Well, you won't have the chance," said Nellie.

But strange to say the very next morning she did.

It was examination day and Miss Gardner, their teacher, put the classes through a general review. For some reason or other Nellie did not seem quite herself. Her answers were slower and not so confident as usual and when her turn came round she felt herself growing eager and over-anxious. The questions, falling thick and fast, made Dot in her excitement shake in her shoes and she had no time to think of anything except how to save herself and keep her place next to the head which she had won with so much difficulty and hard work.

Up and down the line went the questions, tripping up this one and sending the other ahead of her. Geography, history, arithmetic, spelling! No one

knew what would come next and no one had any chance to guess. Nellie's face grew white and drawn under the strain, but she held her place in spite of all, while Dot, beside her, clung to hers as if by main force. Some of the girls began to cry because they had failed and some because they were so afraid they were going to. And still Miss Gardner did not stop. The long hand of the clock had almost caught up with the short one at twelve. In a moment the "letting-out bell" would ring and that would be the end of the misery.

"Six times thirteen," questioned Miss Gardner.

"Seventy-eight," answered Nellie hoarsely

"Capital of Arkansas?"

"Little Rock!" Dot trembled.

A second later and almost before they had time to catch their breath it was their turn again.

"Spell caution," commanded Miss Gardner.

"C-a-w-t-i-o-n, caution!" answered Nellie.

"Next!" said Miss Gardner.

"C-a-u-t-i-o-n, caution!" spelled Dot in a gasp.

"Right! Pass up head."

The long hand of the clock had caught up with the short one and the bell rang out twelve loud, resounding strokes.

“Pass up head, Dot Brooke,” repeated Miss Gardner trying not to see Nellie’s gray, stony face.

But Dot did not obey. Her heart was thumping hard in her side and her head was swimming. She was confused and bewildered and nothing was clear in her mind except the one thought that she must not take Nellie’s place.

“Pass up quickly, Dot,” said Miss Gardner frowning a little at her delay.

But still Dot remained where she was and now the teacher began to suspect that she was being openly defied, though for what reason she could not imagine. She looked at Dot with reproving eyes.

“What is the matter with you, child?” she asked. “See, it is time to dismiss the school. You are delaying us all.”

Dot did not move. Nellie gave her arm a clutch and tried to pull her forward but she might as well have attempted to move the City Hall.

In the meantime Miss Gardner was trying to think out the best way of dealing with a very puzzling problem. She knew that Dot and Nellie were close companions and she thought the reason Dot refused to take her rightful place was that she wanted to be generous to her friend. Well, that was very nice of

course, but it was not to be expected that it should be allowed to interfere with school discipline. If Dot deliberately disobeyed her and she permitted it to pass what could she look for from the other children? In no time at all she would have lost her control of them. Her mind was made up.

“Dot, do you hear me speak?”

Dot’s eyelids quivered.

“Please pass up head at once.”

For a short minute the class held its breath while Dot stood still as a statue and Miss Gardner set her lips.

“This is the first time,” the teacher said at last, “that you have ever disobeyed me, Dot. But unless you instantly do as I bid you, you must be punished. Pass up head this minute or go down to the very foot of the class in disgrace.”

Very, very slowly Dot turned and took a faltering step toward the foot.

“Oh, Miss Gardner—you—you mustn’t, please,” broke out Nellie in a sudden gasp, but she stopped in the middle of her sentence as the teacher said:

“Not a word. School is dismissed,” and turned her back upon them all.

Dot and Nellie walked home together through the clear, cold December sunshine in great unhappiness.

"She's a mean old thing, that's what she is!" scolded Nellie angrily.

Dot swallowed hard. "Well, you know," she said, "I s'pose she thought I was horrid. And I s'pose I was."

"Well, what if you wouldn't mind her? She might have let me say something about it when I tried to," sputtered Nellie. "But I never in all my born days saw such a silly as you are, never to open your mouth when people say things to you. What in the world ails you anyhow, Dot Brooke? Why didn't you go up head, when she told you to? Why did you stand there and never say a word when she kept on and on saying 'Pass up head! Pass up head!'"

"I couldn't," was all Dot had to reply.

But late that afternoon she slipped out of the house with Chiffon at her heels.

Miss Gardner was sitting comfortably before her study fire toasting her toes and resting in the twilight when there was a knock upon her door, and to her surprise there appeared before her in the dusk the figures of a small girl and a smaller dog.

"Why, Dot! What brings you here at this hour?" was her astonished greeting.

Dot gasped and Chiffon began to sniff about suspi-

ciously as if he did not approve of the place and wanted to investigate it thoroughly before permitting his dear missy to take any risks.

“Won’t you sit down?” invited Miss Gardner, drawing up a chair.

Dot dropped into it and Chiffon settled himself at her feet on guard.

“I—I came,” she stammered, “’cause I want to tell you, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be naughty and not do what you said this morning, but I couldn’t, you see, I just couldn’t go ahead of Nellie. She—she’s been good to me. She’s helped me with my lessons all along. They were hard and I couldn’t do them by myself and she ’xplained them all and made it easy for me to keep up. Don’t you see, Miss Gardner, I couldn’t go above her, after that? And besides, Nellie wasn’t well to-day. I guess she felt real sick all over or else she would have spelled it right. She knows how to spell caution better’n I do—lots. She only missed ’cause, well—kind of by accident.”

By the time Dot had got half through her apology Miss Gardner was sitting bolt-upright in her chair.

“But why then, child, did you not say this at the start? Why did you just stand there and disobey me?”

"I—I couldn't tell—before all the class," whispered Dot.

"But you could disobey me before all the class," said Miss Gardner.

This new view of the matter made Dot blink with astonishment.

"Why—why—I never thought of that," she hesitated. "O, Miss Gardner, I'm awfully sorry. I'll say it right out before all the girls to-morrow, if you'll let me. I will, really and truly."

Miss Gardner considered a moment. "And still be quite satisfied to keep your place at the foot of the class?"

"Well—not quite satisfied," admitted poor Dot. "But I'll stay there till I can get up head again."

"Good girl!" declared the teacher. "That is brave as well as honorable."

Dot was almost too happy to reply. It was such a relief to know she was really forgiven and that Miss Gardner was her friend again, that she was ready to take her punishment without complaint.

She kissed Miss Gardner and left the house almost gayly, with Chiffon frolicking at her heels.

It grew dark very early these winter days and she ran the whole way home as fast as she could, to get

in out of the bleakness and dusk of the shadowy streets. Indeed, she was so bent on getting to the house that she did not look left nor right as she ran and did not see a dim shadow dart out suddenly from a hidden nook near a street-corner and seized Chiffon swiftly up in its arms and hide him beneath its coat. But Chiffon saw and was making a frantic struggle to escape when a great coarse hand was clapped firmly over his muzzle and a harsh voice whispered threateningly in his ear :

“Hold still there, you little brute! You’re a lost dog, you are. You’re goin’ to be held for a reward, you are. I know you well an’ what you’re wuth and what yer folks ’ud pay to get you back. O, bless me, yes! I know all about you, I do. I kep’ a sharp eye out that day las’ summer when I came to your basement-door and said sech genteel things to the young lady as owns you—just to detain her and give me time to look around. I’m a smart one, I am. An’ I’ve got you for keeps, my fine white pup, unless I’m paid well to give you up. Lie still there an’ don’t you try to yelp! You won’t? Then take that! Now, we’re off an’ to-morrer we’ll watch the Lost and Found in the newspapers for a reward, you an’ I.”

CHAPTER XV

SURPRISES

WITH Chiffon gone Dot did not much care what happened. The only thing she really took interest in now was the great search Uncle Will and Mr. Huntley immediately set about making for her lost pet. Advertisements were put in the papers offering rich rewards; the police were notified; everything that could be thought of was instantly tried.

The next morning after Dot's visit to Miss Gardner she set out for school white-faced, listless and lonely. Nellie was not with her, for Mrs. Carter had sent Anna over before breakfast to say that the child was really sick and would not be able to leave her bed. It was the last day before the Christmas vacation and it ought to have been a jolly one, but Dot took no heart in it. For all she cared they might just as well have been going on with the usual round of lessons, as recite pieces and have music and receive Christmas gifts and candy. She took her place of disgrace with an aching heart while the rest of the girls looked at

her out of the corners of their eyes and were glad they were not in her shoes.

The opening-bell rang. Dot folded her arms with the rest and sat "at attention." Miss Gardner read a chapter from the Bible and repeated a prayer. Dot was sorry when the Amen was said, for then she had to raise her head.

"Children," spoke Miss Gardner, "before we begin our regular Christmas exercises I want to say a word to you. All who were here yesterday and took part in the examinations remember how unhappily they ended." The teacher paused for a moment, and while she stood silent Dot rose slowly in her place and made her way miserably up the aisle until she stood on the platform with the eyes of the whole class upon her. It was a cruel moment for the shy, sensitive little girl.

"Miss Gardner," she faltered with difficulty, "I want to tell you that—that I'm sorry I was so bad yesterday. I didn't mean to disobey you, but I couldn't pass up head over Nellie 'cause she only missed by accident, 'cause she was sick and—and—besides she'd been good to me. She helped me with my lessons when—when I was stupid and couldn't do 'em alone. And, please forgive me for not minding you. I'll try never to be disobedient any more."

The hush that followed scared Dot more than even the awful sound of her own voice had done. Her knees trembled under her and she began to sway back and forward unsteadily while the room seemed to whirl away from her dizzily. But the next instant all was right again, for Miss Gardner had taken her hand and was saying kindly, "I accept your apology gladly, Dot, and in return I'd like to say that I think our misunderstanding could have been avoided if I, myself, had known how to spell caution: that means if I had not been so hasty. Nellie knew how to spell the word, I am sure, and you are right in feeling she ought not to have lost her place because, being really sick, her mind was not as clear as usual. But I leave it to the class to decide if you are to remain at the foot of the line now you have made the honorable amend. I'll take your vote on it, children. All in favor of having Dot take her old place next the head say 'Aye!' Those not in favor say 'No!'"

Such a thundering chorus of "Ayes!" as broke from the astonished, open-mouthed roomful. There was not one dissenting "No" among them, and Dot found herself reinstated in her old place of honor before she fairly had time to realize it. If it had not been for her grief over Chiffon she would have felt

like dancing for joy. But even Christmas, with all its wonderful delights, did not succeed in really rousing her. Her little friend was gone and she missed him at every turn.

"Dear me!" sighed Aunt Bessie dolefully, "I wish there were something one could do. Will has advertised in the papers time and time again, and has offered absurdly large rewards, and papa has set people searching for the puppy, but it seems as if the little creature had disappeared for good and all, past recovery."

"I can't understand it," said Dearie sadly.

"If Dot would only consent to have another dog. Papa says he would give her one in a minute, but she won't listen to any plan to replace Chiffon."

"No, she really loved the little creature. They were great cronies. I think she would not grieve so if she felt sure no harm had come to him."

"But that's just what we can't be sure of, any of us. It's too dreadful to think what may have happened!"

The following weeks and months passed by in a flash to the older people, while to Dot they seemed to crawl. They might have gone even slower yet if she had known the great happiness that was in store for her, the secret of which the family were keeping close because they were afraid the looking forward

and waiting for it to come true would be bad for her.

Captain and Mrs. Brooke were coming home!

"If they could only manage to get here by the first of May when we open the baby-house," cried Aunt Bessie eagerly. "What fun it would be to have all the celebrations together, and what a treat it would be to see Dot happy again."

But Dot, with never a notion of what was coming, worked on patiently enough until the great May-day really came and she took a last gratified look at the fine stock of dainty baby-sacks her busy fingers had made and that she meant to carry with her as a surprise for Aunt Bessie.

"O dear!" she sighed to herself as she was dressing for the great event. "If only Chiffon were here now! Dearie would have brushed his coat and tied a new ribbon about his neck so he would be extra fine and fancy for this afternoon. And he would be so proud! The babies would like his tricks and would love him so and—and——" As she bent over to tie her shoe-string a bright tear-drop fell to the floor and hid itself, as if it were ashamed, in the wool of the rug.

"Dot!—Dot!"

It was Ellen's voice calling to her from downstairs.

"Dot!—Dot!" repeated Ellen excitedly.

"Yes, Ellen, I'm coming!"

"There's some one at the basement-door wants to see you."

"Wants to see me?"

Who could it be? Nellie never came to the basement door and besides Nellie was getting ready for the opening of the baby-house, just as she was doing herself and would not come over until it was time to start. Who could it be?

She reached the basement-door at last. Ellen, who had hurried on before her, stood in the area-way with Katy beside her and both the women were peering curiously through the grated iron gate into the little paved courtyard outside where a ragged, stooping figure cowered. The man was leaning weakly against the gate trembling and shaking. As Dot appeared he made an effort to touch the brim of his soiled and weather-beaten hat with his hand. He was thin and gray and he spoke in a husky, faint voice as if he had little or no breath to spare.

"Lit'l lady," he panted, "y'r 'umble servant. I'm poor man—jus' out of th' 'ospittle. Was tuk bad las'

December—five months ago—in street—an' fust thing I knowed they'd put me in th' 'ospittle. When I come to and found it out—I wuz dretful upset fer I hed a lit'l dorg with me—jest kinder holdin' him in my arms, like, on the street an' I wuz afeared they'd take him from me an' treat him cruel. But they didn't; they treated him good. I was sure the dorg was yourn. Saw him here las' spring—one day. Would a brung 'im straight back, only o' course I cuddent, bein' so low."

Dot's lips were white and stiff, but she managed to gasp out: "Where is he? O, where is Chiffon?"

"Why, ye see," continued the man, with a sly, side-long glance, "I made 'em bring me the newspaper the fust thing and it had 'tisement in it. Reward offered. I'm poor man—jus' out of th' 'ospittle. If you cud give me suthin' now—for all I've ben through an' fer the fond care I've give that dorg ——"

Dot wrung her hands. Dearie was away—at the baby-house—and she herself had no money. The man saw her hesitation and turned as if to shuffle sullenly off.

"Oh, no, no! Don't go!" implored Dot wildly. "Give me back Chiffon and—and—I'll—I'll give you a reward. I'll give you"—she made a sudden snatch

at the precious jeweled ring Aunt Bessie had given her, dragged it off her finger and held it up for him to see—"I'll give you this!"

The man's evil, sick face flushed and his tired, greedy eyes glistened. "I'll go to get the pup," he faltered shortly as he turned away.

While he was gone Dot was so excited she could not stand still. Ellen and Katy looked at each other and shook their heads. They saw plainly enough that the man was sick, but they did not believe he was honest and they had determined to watch him closely and see that he played no trick upon them. But it was indeed Chiffon that he brought back with him from some neighboring nook where he had left him hidden away. Sadly changed in appearance and broken in spirit as he seemed to be, Dot recognized him at once.

"Chiffon! Chiffon!" she cried, and the little creature struggled faintly in his captor's arms to escape and answer her call. But the man clutched him fast. "E's ben sick, too," he muttered huskily. "But I nussed him faithful and 'e loves me fond, don't you, doggy? It breaks my 'art to give 'im up."

Chiffon's head sank hopelessly and he ceased to struggle.

"O, give him to me! Give him to me!" panted Dot.

"All in good time," quavered the man. "The reward—fust."

Dot thrust the ring forward savagely, the tramp clutched it, and while Ellen and Katy stood by to see there was fair play he gave up the dog, whereupon Katy caught Dot back and slammed the area-gate shut upon him as hard as she could slam it.

"The old impostor!" she said angrily.

"O, Katy," gasped Dot, suddenly remembering, "he's the tramp I told you about last spring, don't you know? The one with the ——"

"Extry polite manners?" suggested Katy. "It's a scamp he is." But Dot cared nothing for the man now. She had recovered her little friend and that was enough. Dirty and unengaging as he looked she carried him in her arms to the baby-house and fondled him all the way.

"I declare," said Nellie, "he seems to be getting better every minute. Poor puppy! But how he did gulp down his lunch. I know he's been starved and I shouldn't wonder if he had been beaten. He looks like it."

"Hush! O please, hush!" Dot implored. "I can't bear to think of it."

The baby-house was beautiful, but she hardly saw it. Its spick and span new furniture, its velvety green lawns, its crowd of gaily-dressed, admiring visitors were not half so interesting to her as Chiffon's sad eyes which seemed to look up at her longingly as if they wanted to tell her all he had been through, and his touching little attempts to bark sounded far sweeter in her ears than the fine music the orchestra-men were playing behind the palms and fernery in the babies' sun-parlor.

There were speeches and hand-clapping: ice cream, cake and lots of chatter and after it was all over and everybody had gone through the baby-house and decided it was "just too lovely for anything" and "a perfect success," Dot and Dearie found themselves driving happily home in the light of a glowing sunset. Mr. and Mrs. Huntley, their kind faces beaming with generous good-will and satisfaction, and Aunt Bessie, her shining eyes full of contentment and hope, were following on behind and it had been arranged that the whole family should take dinner together at "Dot's house," as Nellie called it, for a sort of extra celebration.

“What a big table it’ll be,” sighed Dot happily. “Just like Thanksgiving or Christmas. Everybody’ll be there—even Chiffon. But—but—where is Uncle Will? Why wasn’t he at the baby-house? I should have thought he’d have liked to please Aunt Bessie.”

Dearie looked uneasy. “Uncle Will must have been very busy. I think he must have had sudden news and been called away on an important errand.”

Poor Dearie! it seemed to her the wheels had never turned so slowly and that the drive into town had never been so long. Surely, surely the telegram must have come telling Uncle Will the ship had arrived, else he certainly would have been at the baby-house. And if the ship had really come in, then she would soon see her dear sister again. These last few hours were harder to bear than all the long, long months of separation had been.

“Dearie, Dearie,” cried Dot, peering ahead as the carriage turned at last into their own quiet street, “the people next door to us are moving, I guess. There’s a carriage in front with lots of trunks on it.”

Dearie started and her face grew white. “Don’t look, Dot! Don’t look!” she gasped helplessly.

But Dot did not hear. "No—a lady's getting out of the carriage and going up the steps—our steps. And she looks like—she is—oh, mamma! mamma!"

How she ever reached the pavement Dot never knew. Another instant and she was in her mother's arms—right out there in the street, where every one could see! Then, somehow, like magic, they found themselves in the house. Mr. and Mrs. Huntley, Aunt Bessie, Uncle Will and all and, dear me! what a laughing and crying time there was after that.

"They got in at three," she heard Uncle Will explaining to Aunt Bessie and Dearie, as if she were in a dream and his voice was coming from far off. "I didn't telegraph you as I had promised to do when the ship was sighted because there was no telling just when it would get in. So I went down to the pier myself to meet them and brought them straight home and—here we are, you see!"

"They?—them?" echoed Aunt Bessie and Dearie in a breath and full of bewilderment. "You don't mean Henry has come too? We thought he'd have to follow on his own ship!"

Uncle Will laughed. "Yes, Henry has come too,"

he replied with a merry look at Dot's mother. Then with a great flourish he threw open the library door and in stepped a neat-looking woman with a white-cloaked baby in her arms.

"Allow me to present my nephew, Master Henry Huntley Brooke who is, his mother tells me, to be the especial and particular property of Aunt Bessie and me. Bess, come here and see this precious youngster. He's named for your father just as little Sweetheart was, and ——"

But Aunt Bessie did not wait for more. She gave Dot's mother one long, grateful, tearful look and then hungrily gathered Master Baby to her heart while he gurgled and crowed and tried to grasp at the shimmering, golden head bending over him.

"O, Dearie, Dearie!" sobbed Dot from her mother's arms and under the impression she was laughing, "and papa coming home in a few days! Did you ever know of so many good things happening? Chiffon and then the baby?"

How everybody laughed at Chiffon's being put first.

"'Chiffon and then the baby!'" echoed Uncle Will mockingly. "Look out, Dot, Master Newcomer will be jealous!"

But Dot knew better. "Good friends are never jealous," she said. "And we'll all be good friends together, you know. The very best friends in the world."

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